

The Possible Faith Formation
in the Experience of the Asian-American
Immigrant Community

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
1. INTRODUCTION	1
2. THE EXPERIENCE OF ASIAN AMERICAN IMMIGRANT COMMUNITY	8
I. Survival	
A. Asian Americans in American Immigrant History	
B. The Motives for Asian-Americans' Immigration	
II. Suffering Community	
A. Racial Discrimination	
B. Econo-Political Exploitation	
III. Identity Crisis	
A. Cultural Humiliation	
B. Identity Ambiguity Among Younger Generation	
3. COMPARATIVE STUDY OF ASIAN AMERICAN IMMIGRANT COMMUNITY WITH JUDEO-CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY IN THE UNDERSTANDING OF THE BIBLICAL FAITH FORMATION	42
I. Introduction	
II. Patriarchal Faith Formation	
III. Exodus	
IV. Babylonian Captivity and After	
V. Pentacostal Event	
4. SIGNIFICANCE OF ASIAN AMERICAN IMMIGRANT COMMUNITY IN THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD I; SOCIO-CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE	63
I. Introduction	
II. Spiritual Strength Through Suffering	

III. Cultural Perspective	
5. SIGNIFICANCE OF ASIAN-AMERICAN IMMIGRANT COMMUNITY IN THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD II; THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE	76
I. Introduction	
II. Beyond Religious Exclusivism	
III. Searching for a Just and Sustainable Society	
6. CONCLUSION	96

BIBLIOGRAPHY

ABSTRACT

This project is an attempt to pursue the possible faith formation of Asian-Americans in their experience and cultural heritage.

Asian-Americans are the contemporary sojourners in the newly emerged global community. They have immigrated from the Oriental hemisphere to the Occidental hemisphere geographically and have experienced the process of acculturation in a foreign land. Along with their experience of moving, both geographically and culturally, they also created spiritual strength to pursue a better society in which human conflicts would be diminished. Since they have suffered due to their unique identity socio-culturally, they tend to cherish challenging spirit with endurance to pursue a more appropriate society for themselves.

In this dynamic of their life struggle, a formation of faith is needed which should be contemporal and transformative. Historically, faith in one's experience gives a way to build a new community. The Scripture witnesses this fact in the faith of the pro-Israelites, Exodus event, and the nascent Christian community. The Asian-Americans who have experienced the present conflicts of the pluralistic world in various social spheres would be one of the ethnics who have a seedbed of faith which would lead to a new community in the contemporary world.

Chapter II deals with the socio-historical experiences of Asian-Americans in America as a basis of this project. Chapter III is a comparative study between the Judeo-Christian experience and that of Asian-Americans in seeking the possible factors of faith formation for Asian-Americans. In Chapter IV and V the study is done on how and what impacts Asian-Americans would bring in the contemporary social and rel-

igious environments.

Finally, this project is designed for Christian education for Asian-Americans and seeks a proper approach to the problems of several contemporary theological issues.

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Asian-Americans, who are an emerging immigrant group in the United States of America, have been a wandering people in terms of identity frustration in the socio-cultural environment. They are neither Asians nor Americans, traditionally speaking, but have assumed a new identity to bear new socio-cultural experiences. If this new identity is put into the contemporary pluralistic world, it might be an experimental case for dealing with pluralism and seeking a way of overcoming the present conflicts.

This project is an attempt to form a workable faith for the experience and cultural heritage of the Asian-Americans to adopt as a means of building a just and sustainable society in the contemporary global community. In doing so, the author hopes to add a vital element to the life of the Asian-Americans and let them take their place in history according to their given possibilities as human beings.

For my view, since the world has become dominated by Western industrial and capitalistic development, there are many problems in individual, national and global dimensions. The expansion of materialism and urbanization has deepened the problems always found in human relationships. International capitalistic trade has made it possible for capitalists to exploit laborers, as the advanced countries exploit the developing countries. The rapid development of industrialization has brought ecological deterioration. In addition to these problems, there

are many threats to human life, such as the nuclear arms race between stronger nations and increasing malnutrition in underdeveloped countries. Contemporary human beings need to hear about a community which has experienced the agony of the present world and whose social life has suffered therefrom. So, as a methodology, the project undertakes to interpret the experiences and cultural heritage of the Asian-American immigrant community as a valuable theological resource.

To do this work, I will start from the experience of life as a source of faith. In this pluralistic age, faith cannot be defined in one form. It must be expressed in various terms, but its concrete historical character becomes a fundamental basis in which faith occurs. Life and faith interact with one another to give life meaning in terms of divine human relationships in a certain social context. Essentially, faith is bound up with meaningful survival, which all human beings seek in their life struggle. According to my biblical understanding, basically, the term "survival" has three meanings: Living for survival (Abraham), liberation from oppression (Exodus), transformative life for the future existence of this world (Early Christianity) with acculturation in a foreign land or context. These are stages of social survival. People have experienced these aspects of survival individually in their daily lives and relationships with others.

The Asian-Americans came to America as a necessary move to create a better econo-political structure. A better life has been sought in all three dimensions identified above. Their basic purpose for immigration is econo-political survival. In America they have been struggling with

racism, cultural abuse, and systematic exploitation by the oppressor group. In this experience, they might, paradoxically, have a vision to nurse a just society in the process of assimilation. Furthermore, because of their cultural heritage that is wholistic, they might naturally feel some responsibility for the creation of a new approach to the world view that could keep this earth more sustainable.

Another term I take seriously is the concept of suffering community (the suffering servant in the Bible). In the book of Isaiah, it is written that suffering has redemptive power. The concept of suffering is directly related to Jesus' crucifixion for universal redemption. Some black theologians use the term "suffering" as Black experience. I would say, also, that the Asian-American, who has a hyphenated identity like the Afro-American, has suffered in various social settings of the dominant westernized white American system. It is true that there are at least two differences between the experiences of Black people and those of Asian-Americans. First, Asian-Americans immigrated to America voluntarily, while Afro-Americans were forced to come by white slave merchants. Second, the Asian-Americans' cultural and religious heritage is different from that of the Blacks. However, since Asian-Americans were used to fill a deficiency in America's labor force, their status is similar to that of the Blacks, because most of them belong to a subclass in America's present capitalistic hierarchy of social status. The difference between Blacks and Asian-Americans in the economic structure is the time of immigration from their homelands. Asian-Americans' culture shock is perhaps just as great as that of the Blacks,

because of the cultural heritage of Asian-Americans and its basic conflicts with North American culture, they are confused about their identity and way of life. So Asian-Americans have suffered socially, economically and politically, as well as culturally. Through this suffering a new bud might bloom into a new religio-cultural vision for this materialistic world. John B. Cobb, Jr., once said, "What we produce must not simply be Western or Eastern but must be a new creation" (at the conference on "Spirituality in a Technological Age").¹

In this paper I hope to present the concept of God as a transformative power in understanding Asian-Americans social experience as a basic source of faith. As far as life is a basis of faith, we should avoid the mythical projection of God as well as a patriotic, civil religion. Because of the character of the nomadic life of the Hebrews, they conceptualized a nameless God ("I will be who I will be" in a futuristic sense) who protected them wherever they went. Agricultural tribes who surrounded the Hebrews fixed their Gods' images. Instead of the regional image of God accepted by other tribes, the Hebrew God is universal who helps the people constantly in the creation of new communities for the sake of universal redemption. If we claim ourselves to be descendents of the Judeo-Christian tradition, we must acknowledge God in God's relationship with our social context as we constantly move toward a new community. In this sense, we feel God's presence in the life of the contemporary

¹Judy Weidman, "Materialism, Spirituality viewed," Circuit West (May 6, 1983) 4.

Asian-American Immigrant Community. God is a transforming power in both our individual and social life.

Many attempts have been made to interpret the Asian-American Immigrant Community theologically. Theologians usually present some merits of cultural heritage and the analysis of immigrant social structure viewing the possibility of an Asian-American theology, but there is no systematic approach on the basis of wholistic biblical and theological interpretation. They have done this partially in essays. Their main efforts have been expended in trying to use partial Biblical interpretation to form an ecclesiastical strategy for Asian-Americans. So, it is hoped that this project suggests a possible way of forming an Asian-American faith formation based on recent theological and biblical understanding.

In doing so, I am going to attempt to present a theological basis that will hopefully help Asian-Americans to overcome their identity crisis and to become world citizens who have a sense of calling to bear a new image for the welfare coming generations. At the same time, I will try to share my perspective in which it might be said that the world should be, figuratively speaking, an immigrant community, because I think that the Asian-American Immigrant Community would provide a very significant model to the contemporary world.

In Chapter II, I will take a closer look at the experiences of the Asian-Americans in North America. This chapter has three parts that investigate the Asian-Americans' eagerness for survival, their suffering in social, economical and political dimensions, and their cultural

frustration and ambiguous identity. My reason for dealing with the historical experiences of Asian-Americans is that I assume that one's identity and perspective can be defined by one's historical experience. Chapter III will compare the experiences of the Asian-Americans to the experiences of the Israelites based on my biblical understanding which convinces me that one's faith is influenced by one's environment. In this chapter I will investigate the Israelites' social environment as it relates to the nature of each historical stage as a seedbed for the development of their faith. I will relate their basic survival in their patriarchal period, the necessity of liberation from the economical and political exploitation in the Exodus, their national redemption broadening to a universal redemption through the Babylonian captivity, and the initiation of a new human community in which love and justice are mandated in the Pentacostal event. At the end of each part I will describe possible elements in the formation of faith in the experience of the Asian-Americans as it compares with the tantamount experience of the Israelites. From Chapter IV on, I will deal with the contributions the Asian-Americans could make in the development of the contemporary global community from their cultural heritage and immigrant experience in America. In Chapter IV, I will consider the challenging spirit of the Asian-Americans, their family structure -- with its emphasis on group solidarity -- and their inherent love of nature in the contemporary problem-laden world with its capitalistic, materialistic and exploitative environment. This chapter will be done primarily in terms of the socio-cultural perspective. Chapter V will address several of the current

theological issues; dialogue between living faiths and searching for a just and sustainable society in the acquired social experience of the Asian-Americans and their wholistic understanding of nature.

Chapter 2

THE EXPERIENCE OF THE ASIAN-AMERICAN IMMIGRANT COMMUNITY

I. SURVIVAL

A. Asian-Americans in American Immigrant History.

America has been viewed as a land of opportunity by most of the immigrants who have come here. In fact, except for aboriginal Indians and some Mexicans, all Americans and their ancestors who have immigrated from elsewhere to America have sought some opportunity to fulfill their dreams. There were two waves of immigration. According to James Stuart Olson, the first wave took place from 1776, the establishment of the American Government, to 1876, the end of reconstruction after the Civil War. The second one occurred from 1876 until 1924, the year of the enactment of the National Origins Immigration law. At this same time, the Great Depression dimmed the attractiveness of America. These two immigrant waves were different in terms of ethnicity. The first one was mostly Western and Northern Europeans and the second one brought Southern and Eastern Europeans, and Asians.

Historians call those who came to America before 1776 "settlers," because they came during the colonial period. These first settlers came mostly from Western Europe for religious and social freedom. A few came from Africa as victims of the slave trade. Olson reports the population and its ethnic balance in the early period.

In 1776 perhaps 3 million people were living in what is now the continental United States. The 1.2 million people of English descent

were the largest group. There were about 600,000 Afro-Americans, most of them slaves in the South, and 600,000 to 700,000 native Americans, by now living in upstate New York, the Ohio Valley, the Southeast, and beyond the Mississippi River. The Scots-Irish and Germans, with 300,000 and 250,000 people respectively were the other major ethnic groups in America. Finally there were perhaps 200,000 French, Dutch, Belgian,¹ Welch Scots and Jewish settlers, most of them in the middle colonies.

As compared with recent population figures--about 60 million in 1890, more than 150 million in 1945, and the present figure of about 220 million, the number of early settlers is quite small. There is a great deal of ethnic diversity. We can recognize that America surely depends on immigrants to sustain its economic expansion and population growth.

Since the inception of America as a nation, the flow of immigrants had continued in great numbers until 1876. This is the first wave of immigration. Due to the impact of the first settlers, in terms of ethno-religious character, it carried mostly a Protestant population except for Irish Catholics.. Most of the immigrants came from England, Scotland, the Netherlands, Germany and France, and there were involuntary immigrants from Africa in the first wave of immigration to America. Unlike the colonial settlers, those in the first wave of immigration were "inspired less by social, political, and religious discontent than by economic motivation."² The first wave of immigrants added 10 million to America's population.

After the Civil War, in the time of vigorous westward expansion and rapid urban development, America needed a labor force to fill its

¹James Stuart Olson, The Ethnic Dimension in American History (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1979) 46.

²Ibid., 62.

shortages. Simultaneously, in Eastern and Southern Europe and Asia, internal turmoil increased as an aftermath of their industrial development. Agricultural areas were changing rapidly. Many nations disintegrated after World War I. America was anxious to accept the needed labor force from Europe and Asia. This is a cause of the second wave of immigration. The ethnicity was dramatically changed in the second wave. For example, "between 1900 and 1910, when nearly 8.8 million immigrated, approximately 2.2 million were from Austria-Hungary, 2.1 million from Italy, 1.6 million from Russia, and almost 308,000 from China, Japan and Turkey."³ From 1880 on, ethnic diversity and cultural plurality have become real in American society. During that time immigrants began to examine their ideal of the equality of all human beings. The result was the reverse of their ideal. During the second immigrant wave, there was racial discrimination. White Anglo-Saxon protestants felt threatened by the new immigrants' cultural and religious expression and their cheap labor. The forty-one-volume report of the Dillingham Commission, issued in 1902, is an exemplary critic against Southern and Eastern European's immigrants to America.

Racial discrimination is not an isolated incident in American history. In the colonial period, German immigrants were challenged by English nationalistic prejudices, and Irish immigrants were isolated due to their catholicism. But, owing to the similarity between German protestantism and the religious attitude of English settlers, the racial

³Ibid., 208.

tension between them was not serious. The worse case was that, due to being all white, these groups united in discrimination against the Indians and Blacks in their society. Thereafter, the so-called Teutonic groups claimed racial superiority, and being chosen by God, in their own prejudiced view of human evolution, they tend to be aggressive in their treatment of other ethnic and religious groups. Throughout American history other ethnic groups besides whites have had to endure the racial prejudices of Anglo-Saxons. The Jim Crow law "separate but equal" was enacted in 1896 to discriminate against Blacks in America. The Indian policy was more bitter than any other. From the adoption of the reservation system that established the first reservation in Virginia in 1646 to the Danes Severalty Act in 1887, in which a specified amount of reservation land was allotted to each Indian, the Indians were deprived of all that they owned. The whites killed unaccountable numbers of Indians, feeling that Indians were heretics and barbarians, and were therefore, dangerous.⁴

Asian-Americans, a totally different ethnic and cultural group, had immigrated during the second wave of immigrants. They also had to settle down in a period of harsh prejudice. The Asian-American immigrants were the latest flock to immigrate to America. Since white Americans had already discriminated against other colored peoples, Asian-Americans have been ill treated as well. Some laws were passed to facilitate such discrimination as overtaxation and segregated schooling for Asian-American

⁴Olson, 11.

children. The first exclusion law in American immigrant history was enacted to keep the Chinese out in 1882. The anti-miscegnation law, directed against Asians in 1906, was amended from the law prohibiting marriages between whites and blacks and then prohibited marriages between whites and mongolians.⁵ The Alien Land Act in 1913 prevented Asians from purchasing land, since foreign-born Asians could not have citizenship until the McCarren-Watter Act in 1950. The Repatriation Act was enacted after the Philippine Independence Act. Executive Order 9066 required all Japanese--citizens or foreign-born, living within 200 miles of the Pacific Ocean--to be moved to internment camps.⁶ In addition to these legal actions, Asian-Americans have suffered racial discrimination in their second generation assimilation and have even been lynched in several riots during the early economic depression, before 1890. Some of the early Asian-American immigrants stated that they had, without reason, been beaten by white young hoodlums as they walked on the streets. Likewise, Asian-Americans had to survive in the American social environment. Survival was their primary goal in the early immigrant period.

The Asian-American immigrant period can be, in general, divided into two periods. The first one is from the beginning of the early Chinese immigration to the end of World War II, the second is thereafter. This division is based on the enactment of the McCarren-Watter Act in 1950. This act allows the foreign-born Asian-Americans to become citizens.

⁵Wesley S. Woo, The History of Pacific and Asian-American Churches in Their Communities (Berkeley: PACTS, 1977) 33.

⁶Ibid., 34.

During World War II, the immigration law was relaxed when the Chinese Exclusion Act was repealed in 1943 due to the fact that China was an ally of the United States and Pacific Islanders were allowed to immigrate to the United States through United States Navy ties. Internally, the community of Asian-Americans had a chance to show that they were dedicated to American politics during World War II, despite bitter racial treatment, such as the Japanese internment camps. This led to a condition in which white folks might forget their suspicions toward Asian-Americans. Since then, the white view of Asian-Americans as strangers has lessened to the point at which Asian-Americans are no longer considered foreigners, but have become Asians living in America as a part of America. This point can be a criterion in identifying the periods of Asian-American immigration.

From a different perspective we could consider the year of the second period of Asian-American immigration to be 1965, in which every nation, regardless of ethnic privilege, was allocated an annual quota of 20,000 immigrants. Immigration laws passed in 1921, 1924, and 1952 based on the national origins quota system, made immigration nearly impossible for Asians because of proportionate allocations set by previous Asian immigrant numbers. The laws privileged only those in the Western hemisphere, especially Northern and Western European Asians were not considered under these laws, de facto. This discrimination against Asians was changed during World War II because war brides and Asians hired by American forces had to be taken into America. Skilled labor was tremendously needed because of the economic expansion initiated by World War

II. In 1965, the racial quotas in immigration law had to be abolished for the sake of reuniting families and acquiring needed laborers from other countries. From 1965 on, numbers of Asian-Americans in the community and the visibility of Asian-Americans have been sharply increased.

The Asian-American community is still a minority and confronts racial discrimination in the American social structure. Asian immigrants, with their peculiar cultural customs, go through culture shock and the difficulty of assimilation. Furthermore, most of them have to survive through menial jobs, due to their deficiency in speaking English, despite the fact that they are highly educated and skilled persons. Even the descendents of the early Asian-Americans are faced with great difficulty in being assimilated into the American social structure. There is racial discrimination, even now, as immigrants attempt to rise in their careers to a level suitable to their educational background.

In summary, throughout their history, the Asian-Americans' main theme has been "survival" in cultural, economical, and social dimensions.

B. The Motives for Asian-Americans' Immigration.

The first Asian-American immigration consisted of Cantonese immigrants who resided in the southeastern part of China in 1848. The cause of the immigration was the combination of problems within their motherland and the attraction of America.

The first internal cause was overpopulation compounded with economic failure because of droughts. In Kwantung, where most of the

Cantonese immigrants lived, agriculture had been the main source of income. Since Cantonese agriculture was dependent on hot monsoon summers and cool winters, droughts were devastating. Even when the harvest was good, the farmers earned barely enough to satisfy their hunger, because their income was little and their families were enormous.⁷ The second internal cause was social disturbance. Since the first Opium War with England, "British textiles entered Kwantung, ruined local producers, and vastly increased unemployment."⁸ In this condition, the peasant revolt led by Hang Hsui-Chuan in Kwangsi, spread to Kwangtung and turned into "a general uprising of discontented scholars denied admission to the civil service; merchants resentful of taxes imposed by British officials, Cantonese residents suffering from economical disruption; troubled peasants wanting land reform; democrats hoping to destroy political tyranny; and Hakkas (which means "guest people" immigrating from North China in the thirteenth century) planning to blunt the power of the Cantonese."⁹ This rebellion completely destroyed the rural economy, and more than 20 million people died. In this bitter situation, the Cantonese needed more security for themselves and their families. One possibility was immigration. In addition to this, Pyan Ling points out that a decisive factor in the Cantonese immigration is the character of the Cantonese: an independent, adventurous and unbending spirit. Since China has an integral

⁷Pyan Ling, "Causes of Chinese Emigration" in Roots: An Asian-American Reader (Los Angeles: University of California, 1971) 135.

⁸Olson, 181.

⁹Ibid., 182.

civilization, Chinese are not a migratory people. They stick to their proud civilization wherever they go. Despite this nationalistic spirit, the Cantonese have immigrated because of their independent and adventurous character which has been fostered through the vicissitude of their political struggle in China.¹⁰ Added to this, the attraction of a new adventure and a new land is significant in motivating Chinese immigration to America. During the internal turmoil in China, American merchants brought news of gold in California and lured troubled peasants with promises of high wages in the "Golden Mountain." The opportunity was given to the Cantonese to go abroad to make a fortune. They had a way to fulfill their responsibility to protect their families financially. Actually, few Cantonese dared to immigrate to America. In 1880 there were 105,000 Chinese in America.¹¹ They were sojourners hoping to make return visits to China.

Following the Chinese, other Asian-Americans immigrated to America for similar reasons. The early Japanese immigrants were agrarians. After the Meiji Restoration in 1868, Japan changed from a feudal kingdom to a modern power. During this change peasants had to suffer double taxes, paying to the daimyo and samurai under the old social system, and to the new government. Furthermore, "in the past peasants had been liable only for a percentage of profits, but after 1873 they paid a fixed tax regardless of income."¹² So, between 1873 and 1900 hundreds of thousands

¹⁰Ling, 135-136.

¹¹Olson, 332.

¹²Ibid.

of Japanese farmers lost their land because of tax delinquency. Japanese farmers started a search for some way out of this internal disturbance. Immigration began after 1886, when Japan legalized emigration. Influenced by the Western economy and recognizing the need for relief, the Japanese government enacted emigration laws.

Likewise, Korean immigration was initiated in 1902 by the Suminwon (Department of Immigration within the Imperial Household Department "for the purposes the education, observation, and to engage in commerce, industry, and agriculture.")¹³ Lee and Chang-su Houchins describe the situation when the Suminwon was about to be established:

The social situation in Korea in late 1902 was desperate. A cholera epidemic raged through the summer, exacerbating the effects of a second year of drought, flood, and locust plague. Severe famine prevailed in the three southern provinces and Hwanghae, northwest of Seoul. Large numbers of urban Koreans found themselves in equally distressing circumstances.¹⁴

Besides this internal economic disaster, Hawaiian sugar planters recruited Korean workers through the American Consulate in Seoul and American missionaries.¹⁵ Workers were promised that they could make a fortune. In fact, most (of the Korean immigrants) were from the Incheon port area (near Seoul), and nearly half were members of the congregation at (American missionary) Jone's Yongdong Church.¹⁶ Before Korea became

¹³Lee and Chang-su Houchins, "The Korean Experience in America, 1903-1924," Norris Hundley, Jr. (ed.) The Asian-American (Santa Barbara: CLIO Press, 1976) 133.

¹⁴Ibid., 133.

¹⁵Ibid., 131-132.

¹⁶Ibid., 130.

a protectorate of the Japanese in 1905, about 7,226 Korean immigrants were admitted to Hawaii during the years 1903-1905.¹⁷

The first wave of Philippine immigrants came to America in the aftermath of the Spanish-American War and the "Philippine Insurrection" which left an estimated one million dead.¹⁸ The economic system had been ruined. As in the case of the Koreans, the early Philippine immigration was hardly limited because of the annexation, in 1898, of the Philippine Islands by the United States. The Philippine immigration easily replaced the Chinese and Japanese immigrants after the exclusion law in 1924.

As we have seen from the environment from which the early Asian-Americans immigrated to the United States, they chose immigration as a means of pursuing bare survival out of their country's social turmoil and economic failure. The early Asian-Americans were de facto "sojourners." They were seeking an opportunity to improve their economic condition and hoped to return to their countries to live affluently. In fact, most of the early Asian-Americans were young unmarried males who took a risk to go abroad to make a fortune. For instance, "The Philippines were largely a male immigrant group (14 to 1 ratio); preponderantly young (under the age of thirty); and largely unmarried (77.3%)."¹⁹ The Chinese immigrants were typically young males. From

¹⁷Ibid., 133-134.

¹⁸Helen Kim (ed.). Understanding the Pan Asian Client (San Diego: Union of Pan Asian Community, 1928) 56.

¹⁹Violet Rabaya, "Filipino Immigration: The Creation of a New Social Problem" in Roots, 191.

this simple fact we may affirm that the early Asian-American immigrants intended to return to their country after a short stay in America. This situation is not restricted to the Asian-American immigrants. James Olson describes the Southern European immigration pattern: "their only intentions had been to find temporary work in the United States, live frugally and save money, and return home with the financial resources to buy land or redeem debts."²⁰

The early Asian immigrants came to America voluntarily. The Africans were imported by slave traders. It was the bitterest event in human history. The first African slaves were taken by the Portuguese in 1443 and sent to work on their Brazilian sugar plantations.²¹ The English then created the Royal African Company, ending the Portuguese and Dutch monopolies. The Southern area of North America became filled with Afro-American slaves, who were essential for agricultural development.²² Throughout American history, Blacks have been treated with undeserved racial discrimination. They were property, subject to be killed when they escaped from their slave camps. Psychologically, they tended to have low self-esteem until the Black movement in the late 1960's. The early Asian-Americans had suffered similar laws and low self-esteem. However, the difference between the early Asian-Americans and the Blacks is apparent when we consider voluntary versus involuntary immigration. The early

²⁰Olson, 218.

²¹Ibid., 39.

²²Ibid.

Asian-Americans, themselves, risked finding a better life. Their instinct for survival is not a given factor in their departure from the harsh social environment, but they experimented by themselves to take a chance on improving their situation by going beyond the given environment.

Contemporary Asian-American immigrants are family-oriented. After World War II and the revision of the Immigration Law in 1965 there are, in general, three types of Asian-American immigrants: those for family reunion, skilled laborers and political refugees. Unlike the early Asian-American immigrants, they are mostly educated and skilled persons. They have no reason to leave their countries except their intention to seek a better living environment for themselves and their children. Their concern for their children's education and welfare is one of the primary motives. The oriental ethic of family solidarity emphasizes parental responsibility for taking care of their children and vice versa. But, like the early Asian-Americans, the recent Asian-American immigrants have also had to confront racial discrimination to a certain degree in terms of cultural and structural assimilation. And, despite their capabilities, they have to relive through menial jobs in their new environment because of their deficiency in the second language--English.²³ Their adventure in the American society is a struggle for economic, cultural and structural survival, de facto, for the early and recent Asian-Americans alike.

²³Eui-Young Yu, "Koreans in America: Social, and Economic Adjustments," Byong-suk Kim and San Hyun Lee (eds.). The Korean Immigrant in America (Montclair: AKCS Publication, 1980).

II. SUFFERING COMMUNITY

A. Racial Discrimination.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the Anglo-Saxon racists were vociferous in defending the legacy of Anglo-Saxon oriented culture and its representative democratic system, criticizing so-called "inferior races" coming from Southern and Eastern Europe and Asia. Their racial prejudice was backed up by "scientific fact" in Darwin's evolutionary method of biology and social science. As a consequence, anti-immigration agitation was begun. Frederick Jackson Turner was convinced that the coming of Italians, Poles, Russian Jews, and Slavics was "a loss to the social organism of the United States."²⁴ His main concern was that living conditions in America would deteriorate because these Southern and Eastern Europeans ruined "the upward tendency of wages" and encouraged the "sweatshop system" in urban industrial areas.²⁵ Jorjah Strong, the Social Gospel Clergyman, evaluated the Southern and Eastern Europeans as "inferior races," "depressing our average intelligence and morality in the direction of the dead-line of ignorance and vice" because they were Catholics and Jews.²⁶

The treatment given to Southern and Eastern Europeans by Anglo-Saxons was not harsher than that given to the Asians. Although they were

²⁴Thomas F. Gossett, Race (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1963) 292.

²⁵Ibid., 292-293.

²⁶Ibid., 294.

considered inferior in terms of economic activity and religious conviction, they were more or less well accepted by Anglo-Saxons because they were white and European. Since America was thought to be the expansion of European civilization, Asian immigrants were treated as "aliens" and it was believed that there was no way that they could be assimilated. Bayard Taylor thought that the Chinese were "morally, the most debased people on the face of the earth."²⁷ Gompers said that "they have no standard of morals by which a Caucasian may judge them."²⁸ Regarding this view, the first law enforced against the Chinese was as follows,

As early as 1854, the Chinese in California were barred from testimony in courts in cases involving whites. The reasoning of the Supreme Court of California in arriving at this direction was that since the Indians were not allowed to testify in the courts against whites and since the Chinese and the Indians were of the same race, the Indians having many centuries ago come from China, the law which applied to the Indians should also apply to the Chinese.²⁹

Racially, the Chinese were thought to be "mongolians" and "barbarians." They could not build human dignity in white racial prejudice. Henry George once asserted that "the Chinaman was capable of learning up to a certain point of adolescence, but unlike the Caucasian he had a limited point of development beyond which it was impossible for him to go."³⁰

²⁷Ibid., 290.

²⁸Ibid., 291.

²⁹Ibid., 290.

³⁰Ibid., 291.

Along with this degrading evaluation, the Chinese had to go through life-threatening riots by white laborers due to their "cheap labor" in the economic depression in the late nineteenth century. They became a sacrifice between the white employers and laborers in the capitalistic economy. Concerning white riots against the Chinese, Stanford Lyman reports:

The first significant urban uprising took place in San Francisco in 1869, and another far more serious riot occurred in the midst of a Tong war in Los Angeles' Chinatown on October 24, 1871. After two policemen and a bystander had been killed, a white mob descended on the Chinese quarter and in but four hours killed at least nineteen Chinese, including women and children, burned several buildings and looted shops. Six years later unemployed laborers burned and looted San Francisco's Chinese ghetto for several weeks without any significant interference by public agencies of law enforcement. In 1880 an anti-Chinese riot occurred in Denver. Five years later uprisings against the Chinese occurred in Rock Springs, Wyoming and in Tacoma and Seattle.³¹

This kind of incident is not restricted to the Chinese. In late June 1913, eleven Koreans were severely beaten as they attempted to work in an orchard near Riverside.³² The whites confused the Koreans with Japanese. This was at the height of the anti-Japanese labor movement. Likewise, the early Asian-Americans were threatened physically and psychologically in their treatment by whites. Someone has seriously questioned if any ethnic group was treated more harshly than the Asian-Americans.

If we look over various laws enforced against the Asian-Americans, we see more vividly "the worst treatment" given to any group.

³¹Stanford Lyman, "Strangers in the City" in Roots, 174.

³²Lee and Chang-su. The Korean Experience in America 1903-1926, 142.

The first thing is the exclusion laws against the Asian-Americans. The first exclusion law applied to the Chinese in 1882, and others ensued in 1892 and 1902 to close loopholes, so that virtually all Chinese were excluded. "Why Chinese?" is a significant question. Whites recognized the population of China as a threat to their west coast. In the early twentieth century, a similar Asian-phobia appeared against the Japanese, because some people were afraid of the high rate of Japanese women's procreation. Ironically, the whites' phobia against the influx of Asians triggered exclusion laws against Asians, although Asians were less than one percent of the total population of the United States in 1924. Whites never wanted to be assimilated with Asiatic people. They saw them as a threat. Regardless of how well Asians adjusted to any social and cultural conditions, whites rejected them as "strangers" with a totally different way of life.

One effort to prohibit an Asian influx was severely limiting citizenship for Asians. The prohibition of naturalization of Asians was based on racial prejudice, since Asians were thought to be "mongolians." As early as 1790, congress enacted its first naturalization law in which free white persons were made eligible for citizenship by the naturalization process. Then, by the Naturalization Act of 1870, "aliens of African Nativity or African descent" were added to this class.³³ The racial category of Asians was neither "whites" nor "African descent," so, except for the descendents of Asians born in America, holding

³³Eliot G. Mears, Resident Orientals on the American Pacific Coast (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1928) 99.

"citizenship" naturally, according to the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution of the United States, "all persons born in the United States and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the state wherein they reside."³⁴ Asians immigrating to America had no possible way to acquire "citizenship," regardless of whether they were enlisted in the United States military forces or married to a citizen of the United States.³⁵ Asians had been permanent "aliens" in America until the McCarran-Walter Act in 1950 by which the right of naturalization was conferred on Asians not born in the United States. Regarding racial discrimination concerning Asians acquiring "citizenship," Asians had to live under the Alien Land Act, enacted first in 1913 in California. This law never identifies the "aliens" to which it applies. Since Asians were treated as "aliens," according to naturalization, ruling cases were involved in most of the agricultural activities on the West Coast, the Alien Land Act was directly aimed at depriving Asians of the land they owned and limiting Asian agricultural activities in not permitting arable land to be leased to "aliens" for more than two years.³⁶

Under the whites' racial prejudice, children from Asian families were segregated for education in 1906, although their intelligence level was evaluated as high. The justification for this discriminatory law,

³⁴Albert W. Palmer, Orientalism in American Life (New York: Friendship Press, 1934) 50.

³⁵Mears, 102-104.

³⁶Palmer, 48.

written in the Harvard Law Review, was that this law did not violate the Constitution of the United States "if equal accommodation were given, for segregation is practiced with reference to citizens such as the Negroes in the South."³⁷ This reasoning is clearly based on racial discrimination. Furthermore, this following article says of racial discrimination,

The governing body of the school district shall have power... to establish separate schools for Indian children and for children of Chinese, Japanese, or Mongolian parentage. When such separate schools are established, Indian children, or children of Chinese, Japanese, or Mongolian parentage must not be admitted into any other school.³⁸

Because Asians are Mongolians, segregated education was justified. Another law enacted because Asians are mongolians is the Anti-Miscegenation Law of 1906. California Civil Code, paragraph 60, makes marriage between white persons and Mongolians illegal and void.³⁹ Worse still, in 1924, by an immigration act, a Chinese man was barred from marrying even an alien woman.⁴⁰ Since Chinese were male-dominant immigrants, most of them continued to suffer from the lack of married life.

It is a kind of wonder that racial discrimination concerning acquiring citizenship, the Alien Land Act, segregation for education, and anti-miscegenation was practiced in recent human history. De facto, the Asian-American community suffered under racial discrimination per-

³⁷Mears, 353.

³⁸Ibid., 354.

³⁹Ibid., 145.

⁴⁰Wesley S. Woo, 34.

mitted in the democratic political system.

B. Econo-Political Exploitation.

Migration history might start from the first group that wandered about while looking for a place to sustain and improve their life. These wanderers would need to adequately adjust to the new environment: climate, wild animals, geographical difference and so on. When human beings began to develop skills in utilizing the land they possessed to grow crops and raise animals for both labor and food, areas around rivers became popular agricultural settings. The nomadic life was dropped in favor of the agricultural life style. Many agricultural societies flourished as their civilizations developed social laws, economic systems, political structures, mores, defense forces, and other elements needed by a systematic society. After commercial activities prevailed over agricultural industries, since the industrial revolution in the western hemisphere in the 18th century, migration has resumed internationally, according to the need for labor forces. Blacks from Africa were forced to go to Europe and, finally, to the United States. Some third world people, from Asia and South America, have recently immigrated to the so-called advanced or developed countries. Unlike the first immigrants, these recent immigrants have suffered from the well-developed social system, bias, and the struggle in adjusting to the host countries that have different cultures from their own. Worse still, in the area of economics, immigrants are subject to exploitation for the benefit of the host countries.

Asians started to immigrate in the nineteenth century, mainly for economic reasons, to Hawaii and the West Coast of the main land. Searching for a better life, they came over as laborers working in various fields; agriculture, the mining industry, railroad building, and domestic chores such as laundry work, house cleaning and so on. Their migration is a natural phenomenon. As we have seen in previous parts in this chapter, their migration was caused by both the internal malcondition in their home countries and the external attraction of America. It is not untrue to say that there are no exceptions to these causes of migration for all ethnic groups of which America consists. However, those who resided in America earlier than the Asian migration treated Asians badly in the economic-political arena. To make matters worse, the tactics to exploit Asian laborers were condoned by the government. They used laws to control the influx of Asian laborers and, eventually, to exclude Asians already deeply rooted in the soil of America. We can find a phenomenon in which Asian laborers were replaced by other groups of Asians in different stages of American history. For example, Chinese laborers were replaced by Japanese and Korean laborers after the exclusion law against Chinese immigration in 1882, and the Japanese labor force was replaced by Philippine immigrants after the 1907 "Gentlemen's Agreement" between the United States and Japan was reached to exclude Japanese immigration except for former Japanese dwellers in America, and their families. The Philippines were the only ethnic group to be granted immigration privileges, because the Philippine Islands were considered a protectorate of America. It was intended that Asians would be excluded

after the exclusion law was enacted in 1924.

The first Asian immigrants were Chinese. They were brought here in large numbers, to work on the transcontinental railroad. Many also worked in the mining industry. These jobs were undesirable to white laborers. After two decades of mining work and railroad construction (the railroad was finished in 1876), the Chinese laborers had to move into urban areas and compete with white laborers for jobs created by the newly developed urban industries; woolen, textile, shoe, cigar, gunpowder and a few others.⁴¹ Because of cheap Chinese labor, the white laborers were put out of work and organized to protest against Chinese labor. Eventually, the Chinese were harassed and driven out of the urban industries. During this period, the anti-Chinese movement erupted into physical violence and criticism of the Chinese way of life--culturally, morally and economically. Whites were concerned that the Chinese might fill city council seats, sooner or later. Fear of the Chinese labor force was turned into harsh criticism of the Chinese because whites felt that their economic welfare was threatened. In addition to emotional harassment of the Chinese, laws were enacted to exclude the Chinese as a stumbling block to the whites' social life. The decisive law is the Chinese Exclusion Act, passed in 1882. Ever since this year the Chinese population declined. According to Palmer's statistics, the 105,465 Chinese had grown from 34,923 in 1860 but declined to 61,634 in 1920.⁴²

⁴¹Lyman, 172.

⁴²Palmer, 10.

Some Chinese scholars accused both the United States and the Ching government for not preventing the anti-Chinese movement and its resulting laws such as the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882, the Scott Act in 1888 and Geary Act in 1892.⁴³

The Japanese immigration began in 1886. Around this time, the demand for labor increased on the West Coast, particularly for domestic jobs and the agricultural industry, which the Chinese immigrants had occupied before. Sooner or later, the Japanese immigrants filled this place. As whites welcomed the Chinese in the early period of their immigration, the Japanese were favored by the public. They were described as "more docile and obedient than the Chinese" in the Sacramento Bee in 1893.⁴⁴ Furthermore, because the Japanese brought their families to reside in America, Japanese immigrants were well evaluated by the American public. Some said that the Japanese adjusted well because they were responsible for their families. When the Japanese immigrants were so successful as to become dominant in the agricultural industry and domestic services such as restaurants, laundries, barber shops and so on, the anti-Japanese movement rose fiercely. The favor that the Japanese immigrants had gained in their early period waned. The Pacific Rural Press in 1906 expressed as such, "the Chinese are the most skillful, trustworthy, and devoted laborers California ever had while the Japanese

⁴³Sin-shan H. Ts'ai, "Chinese Immigration through Communist Chinese Eyes" in Hundles, 61-63.

⁴⁴Dennis Ogawa, "The Jap Image," Russell Endo, Stanley Sue and Nathaniel N. Wagner (eds). Asian-Americans: Psychological Perspective (Palo Alto: Science Behavior Books, 1973) 3.

are careless, preoccupied, and untrustworthy."⁴⁵ Also, the white public was worried about the growing Japanese population. They criticized the higher Japanese birth rate and "picture bride" marriages in the Japanese immigrant community. This criticism led to "The Gentlemen's Agreement" between Japan and the United States in 1907. This treaty was enacted to restrict the free flow of Japanese immigrants. However, Japanese immigrants continued to be successful in the agricultural industry in California cultivating more than 460,000 acres in 1920, an increase from 4,700 acres in 1900.⁴⁶ So, in California the Alien Land Act was enacted in 1913. This law aimed at confiscating Japanese arable property, since Asians could not obtain citizenship because of their race origin considered "mongolian." It is noteworthy that the Japanese immigrants were well-organized to protect their profit through their labor unions, and the Japanese government effectively protested against the anti-Japanese movement. But, in the infrastructure of American society, white politicians had nothing to lose by ignoring Asians as a minority and everything to gain by supporting the white majority.

Korean immigrants came to the United States in 1903 after the anti-Chinese movement. They were also "cheap laborers" to work in Hawaii's agricultural plantations. However, since Japan annexed Korea in 1910, their immigration was banned by the Japanese government. During the anti-Japanese movement, Korean laborers were favored, although they

⁴⁵Ibid., 5.

⁴⁶Olson, 334.

were often thought to be Japanese.

When the number of Japanese immigrants was limited by the Gentlemen's Agreement, Philipino laborers were recruited to replace the Japanese who had been supported from 1907 through 1919 by the Hawaiian Sugar Planter's Association.⁴⁷ After the National Origins Act of 1924, Philippine immigrants, as a third wave of Asians, were coming to the mainland. They were not categorized as "mongolians," but rather as "little brown brothers," since the United States annexed the Philippines in 1902. They soon filled in the agricultural labor market that the Japanese had left. According to statistics, their population of 26,634 in 1920 was increased to 108,260 in 1930.⁴⁸ After the Philippine Independence Act in 1934, Philippines were considered "Asians," and their immigration quota was set at 50 persons annually. Between 1930 and 1940 the total Philippine population dropped from 108,260 to 98,132.⁴⁹

Likewise, historically, the influx of Asian immigrants was manipulated by American government according to the international relationship. After the favoritism of certain Asian immigrants was waned, the new group of Asian immigrants were replaced with the old group creating new law enforcements. This kind of treatment is seen more vividly during World War II. The Chinese had been treated the worst of all Asian immigrants. But, during World War II, the United States repealed

⁴⁷Brett Melendy, "Filipino in the United States" in Hundley, 102.

⁴⁸Ibid., 105.

⁴⁹Ibid.

the Chinese Exclusion that had lasted since 1882, and allowed China 105 immigrants per year as a gesture to its ally. However, Japanese immigrants living within 200 miles of the Pacific Ocean were ordered to internment camps throughout the West Coast states in 1942. Among about 110,000 Japanese evacuees, one report says more than sixty percent of them were American citizens.⁵⁰ It is alarming that the security of Asian immigrants, whether they are citizens of the United States or not, is possibly shaky during an American international conflict. Unlike German and Italian immigrants during World War II, Japanese-Americans were used as "hostages" to ensure the security of the United States in the conduct of military strategy. Geographically, a question arises: why were the Japanese evacuated on the West Coast but not in Hawaii, where the Japanese were a majority group? From this question we must acknowledge that political discrimination depends on the minority status.

After the revision of the immigration law in 1965, there has been an influx of Asians into the United States. The recent Asian immigrants have become "a successful minority." This successful minority is engaged in small business and seems to be moving up to "petite bourgeois." However, in the well-developed capitalistic society, it is hard to compete with the monopoly of transnational corporations. Their businesses, therefore, are ethnic-oriented. They employ people of their ethnic group as cheap labor and sell their merchandise to others of their

⁵⁰ Lemuel F. Ignacio, Asian-Americans and Pacific Islanders (San Jose: Philipino Development Association, 1976) 95.

ethnic group. In the case of the garment factories, Asian employers have to maintain low prices for the mother company and pay correspondingly low wages to their employees in order to compete as subcontractors. This is a way of helping the big corporations to exploit cheap immigrant labor.⁵¹

As we observed above, the Asian-American immigrant community has suffered econo-politically. In this experience, for Asian-Americans, America can be seen as nothing but an econo-political unit controlled by the majority. To recognize this fact is painful. It, at least, gives some hope of finding a solution to this past and present experience.

III. IDENTITY CRISIS

A. Cultural Acculturation.

Asian-Americans have been forced into a position of inferiority because current thought is that the westernized industrial culture leads the contemporary world. Along with the economic superiority of whites their skin color, racial development, religion and political system have been considered superior to those of Asians. When we turn to the Asians' view of whites, we find that Asians, living in Asia, have had ethno-paulism against whites about their skin color ("pale face"), or their way of life ("barbarians"), their degree of intelligence ("lower than Asians"), and so forth. In fact, Asians think that they are superior to whites in many ways. Now we are trapped into evaluating other races from

⁵¹Edna Bonacich, Ivan Light, and Charles Choy Wong, "Korean Immigrant: Small Business in L.A.," in Roy Simon (ed.) Sourcebook on the New Immigration (New Brunswick: Transaction Books, 1980) 182.

one's own perspectives. However, it is somewhat natural to belittle other races when a certain race is dominant. In America, where whites compose the majority, Asian-Americans are likely to be considered inferior.

When Asians came to America, they were thought to be "superstitious heathens," since they were not Christians, and "uncivilized people," because of their despotic political system. Since European immigrants had lived with Christianity and believed that salvation lay exclusively in the unique providence of God, Asian-Americans, coming from the Orient, were in need of conversion. Because of this missionary mood, Asian-Americans were subjected to cultural humiliation. Asian-Americans seemed not to have any contribution to American religious life, because their religious practice was so different from that of the European immigrants. This view is shown in the testimony of Mr. Pixley in "the Report of the Joint Special Committee to Investigate Chinese Immigration" (1876). He said:

Ours is a belief in the existence of a Divine Providence that holds in its hands the destinies of nations. The Divine Wisdom has said that He would divide the country and the world as the heritage of five great families: that to the blacks He would give Africa; to the whites He would give Europe; to the red man He would give America; and Asia He would give to the yellow races. He inspires us with the determination not only to have preserved our own inheritance but to have stolen from the red man America; and it is settled now that the Saxon, American or European group of families, the white race, is to have the inheritance of Europe and of America and that the yellow races of China are to be confined to what God Almighty originally gave them; and as they are not a favorite people they are not to be permitted to steal from us what we robbed the American savage of.⁵²

⁵²Report of the Joint Special Committee to Investigate Chinese Immigration (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1877) 27-28.

According to this system, Asian-Americans have had nothing but debasement of their cultural inheritance. Since Asian-Americans have been a minority, and some of them lean toward western culture, deterioration of their ethnic beliefs and practices is accelerated. In their acculturation process, they are losing their identity as Orientals. At the same time, their value system is in confusion. So it becomes obvious that they will soon lose their inner security unless they maintain pride in their cultural heritage.

Being Asian-American in America creates an identity crisis. Asian-Americans undergo a centripetal acculturation simply because they are a minority. They are always on the way. They cannot balance their bicultural experiences midway. So that, socially, they are marginal people who are not only "in between" or "on the boundary" but also "outside," or at the periphery of, the main group of a given society.⁵³ Asian-Americans are rejected by the dominant group because of being peripheral.

Asian countries were considered to be "developing countries from an uncivilized world." Since the Anglo-Saxon brought their representative democratic government, they have felt that their political ideals were the best. From the Anglo-Saxon perspective, Asian-Americans are untrained in politics, therefore, their assimilation into the American system was thought to be impossible. Their presence, under these cond-

⁵³ Sang Hyun Lee, "Called to be Pilgrims," in Kim and Lee, 39.

itions, had a degrading effect on the Western Civilization.

These two forces, Mongolian and American, are already in active opposition. They do not amalgamate, and all conditions are opposed to any assimilation. The American race is progressive and in favor of a responsible representative government. The Mongolian race seems to have no desire for progress, and to have no conception of representative and free election. To admit these vast numbers of aliens to citizenship and the ballot would practically destroy republican institutions upon the Pacific Coast, for the Chinese have no comprehension of any form of government but despotism, and have not the words in their language to describe intelligibly to principles of our own representative system.⁵⁴

The Asian political system was quite different from that of the United States. In China, the traditional confucianistic influence was maintained by elderly advisers and educated officers in each prefecture. Each prefecture had power to rule over its own affairs, and the central government had the authority to interfere where national affairs were involved. This is a kind of representative system, similar to that in the United States except that America has a direct voting system, while China has not. It is a matter of cultural difference. Professor Iyenaga commented on the failure to uphold the "Gentleman's Agreement" between the Japanese and the United States governments.

The system of federal and state government in the U.S. is a stumbling block to the Japanese understanding.... The Japanese find no parallel in their own system. They usually take it for granted that the American state and the powers it exercises are something like their prefecture and the administrative functions it discharges. Accustomed to the all-powerful influences of the Tokyo government and the subservience with which the prefectures obey its order, Japanese are amazed when they see an American state defying the wishes of the President.⁵⁵

⁵⁴Report of the Joint Special Committee, v-vii.

⁵⁵Mears, 51-52.

This statement indicates the difference between the American and Japanese governments. While the United States has the "checks and balances" system, the Japanese government is more or less authoritative in executing administration.

It is difficult to give credit to any political system for effectively dealing with urgently needed policies. Every political system has merits and shortcomings. For this reason, the Asian-Americans' inherited political sense should not be treated as "inferior" or "uncivilized." Political systems should be evaluated in terms of their humanism.

We can see from the foregoing that Asian-Americans were not well-treated. They were, for the most part, ignored by most Americans. Asian-Americans, whether citizens of the United States or not, were considered to be "foreigners." Sometimes they, themselves, wondered what nationality they should claim.

B. Identity Ambiguity Among Younger Generation.

The Asian-American immigrant community has been a minority group during its long depressive history in America. The identity issue has appeared in recent Asian-American literature. There are two reasons for this. One is the younger generation of Asian immigrants. The other is the search for identity that has emerged among the immigrant groups since the late 1960's.

The early Asian immigrants had less identity crisis than the younger generations, because they were not born in America and intended

to return to their home countries after making a fortune. Although they decided to stay in America, their identity was a bit more clear because of their connections with their homelands. The identity crisis among the younger generations is totally different. They were born in America and are United States citizens. They are at home in America. There is still some identity crisis, since they are a minority group, even though they use the English language. Their skin is darker than that of their white peers, and their cultural inheritance from their oriental parents is different. A Japanese second generation persons says this:

We are not considered Americans. We are regarded as aliens and people believe we will always remain Japanese. We of the second generation, on the other hand,⁵⁶ are aliens to our parents. That makes us a lost-generation!

So it is hard to say whether they belong either to America or to their parents' country. Most of the younger generation of Asian-Americans confessed that they are embarrassed when they are asked where they come from. They are a wandering people between two identities; Orientals or Americans. Stonquist, a sociologist, calls them "marginal people."

Meanwhile, they are seeking a new identity in which they can appreciate their oriental inheritance while being American. They are no longer content to be a "banana," a term used to designate a person of Asian descent, who is "yellow on the outside but white on the inside."⁵⁷ Their conclusion regarding their identity is to conform to

⁵⁶Paul Nagano, "The Japanese Americans' Search for Identity, Ethnic Pluralism and a Christian Basis of Permanent Identity" (Unpublished Rel.D. dissertation, School of Theology at Claremont, 1970) 77.

⁵⁷Derald Wing Sue, "Ethnic Identity," in Asian-Americans: Psychological Perspective, 143-144.

their basic existence as human beings. A third generation Japanese expressed himself in this way,

Who am I?
 I sometimes wonder.
 Am I Japanese?
 Am I American
 or just both.
 To the Whites
 I represent the Yellow Peril.
 To the other minorities
 I am looked at with
 contempt as though
 I were white.
 To the fellow Asians
 I am American
 Who am I? I sometimes
 wonder.
 I am me, a human being.⁵⁸

His sure identity is a human being. In this poem, we see a younger generation's identity going beyond nationality. This identity would be a seed to broaden the Asian-Americans' view to a humanistic concern for other human beings.

Since the American minority movement in the late 1960's, Asian-Americans have been searching for their identity. Asians and Black people share a bitter racial experience in America. Through this movement they claim their right to be treated equal. At the same time, their humanistic concern expands to a global consciousness that wants to treat all human beings throughout the earth equally, in non-exploitative ways. So their identity becomes global, not national. This view is shown in the poem entitled "perspective," written by Joann Miyamoto.

⁵⁸Nagano, 79.

When I was young
 kids used to ask me
 what are You?
 I'd tell them what my mom told me
 I'm an American
 chin chin Chinaman
 you're a Jap!
 flashing hot inside
 I'd go home
 my mom would say
 don't worry
 he who walks alone
 walks faster....

but there was always
 someone asking me
 what are you?
 now I answer
 I'm an Asian
 and they say
 why do you want to separate yourselves
 now I say
 I'm Japanese
 and they say
 don't you know this is the greatest country
 in the world.

now I say in America
 I'm part of the third world people
 and they say
 if you don't like it here
 why don't you go back.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ Joann Miyamoto, "Perspectives," in Roy Sano (ed.) The Theologies of Asian-Americans and Pacific Peoples (Berkeley: ACTS, 1977) 1.

Chapter 3

COMPARATIVE STUDY OF ASIAN-AMERICAN IMMIGRANT COMMUNITY
WITH JUDEO-CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY
IN AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE BIBLICAL FAITH FORMATION

I. INTRODUCTION

This chapter is going to be an interpretation of the Scripture focusing on how God's redemptive work in the social life of the Israelites might be utilized to examine whether the experience of Asian-Americans could be the basis for their experience of God.

It is presupposed that God's redemptive work has been present in all human environments--Oriental or Occidental--and in all times. At least, the author, as a Christian, believes that God's works were revealed in the Jewish struggle for a better life throughout their history. According to the Scriptures, I briefly present the Israelites' faith developed throughout the stages of their social environment from the patriarchal period to the birth of Christianity. This is shown by changes in their life from a nomadic family unit to the complicated economic and social life in Egypt, the struggle for unity in the conquest of the promised land, the international power struggle, and the resulting exile and return and the apocalyptic life due to the constant oppressive world history around Israel. Through their faith, God worked as a transformer, or a liberator, in leading them out of each deficient environment. God promised a blessing to the patriarchs for basic survival and liberated them from the Egyptians' social oppression--the Exodus--and so on. God sustained them and gave a new vision as a result

of their social history. My study of the Scriptures shows that God acts through one's faith in relation with one's environment.

From this biblical understanding, I assume that the Asian-American, as a unique identity, has experienced life in various environments and could build a new faith suitable for living in the contemporary world. Asian-American immigrants are the product of the Oriental culture, who came to Western culture-dominated America. They are post-modern nomadic people who have immigrated in search of a better life. This search links them with the Jewish patriarchal striving for survival. As a minority, they have confronted economic-political exploitation by the American majority, and suffered racial discrimination in the American capitalistic system. Furthermore, they are subject to be "enemies" in the international power struggle, as shown by the Japanese internment camps during World War II. They have suffered while trying to build their own identity in spite of conflicts between the Oriental and Western cultures.

If a just God heard the cry of the Jewish people and intervened to improve their life, then the Asian-American community should formulate its theology from experience and express it.

Prior to getting into the Biblical study, two presuppositions need to be made explicit in order to avoid any misunderstanding about my intention.

First, the Old Testament was written over a period of centuries. So, there are various themes in the Old Testament. Also, the Old Testament was completed after the Israelites had found their nationality and

ethnic justification. In other words, the story contained in the book of Genesis was designed to trace the Israelites' national origin but was written after the Exodus. Some people might not credit the story of the patriarchs as being historically accurate. Despite this, my presentation begins with the patriarchal period. The background of the patriarchal story is the earlier period than other historical events. In recent Biblical study, by the help of archaeology the historical background of the patriarchs is more or less proved as an "historical fact." My study will show how human faith is related to this environment.

Second, I am going to examine factors in the formation of faith in each stage of the Israelites' history to find factors in the Asian-American community that may have influenced their faith. Many factors are similar in the two groups. I do not intend to identify the experiences of the Israelites with those of the Asian-Americans, but only to extract the role model of God's redemptive power in the experiences of the Israelites and then to apply it to the experiences of contemporary Asian-Americans. I think that history is broadened in scale. All events in history to do effect life in the same ways, but it looks like a similar human struggle at all times.

II. PATRIARCHAL FAITH FORMATION

Genesis 12-50 contains the story of Israel's patriarchs. Starting with Abram's departure from his father's residence in the ancient city of Haran, it describes how the early Israelites lived and formed a

covenant with God. The historical accuracy of this story is controversial. Biblical scholars put it in various ancient periods, such as Middle Bronze (2200-1550), Later Bronze (1550-1200 B.C.), or Iron Age (1200-300 B.C.).¹ It is certain that the story was written in a later period when the "history" of Israel was considered to be divided into patriarchal, Mosaic, and settlement phases.²

According to the Scripture concerned, Israel's patriarchs lived as semi-nomads. They lived in tents and purchased land while they grazed flocks and herds. They seem to have been pastoral, nomadic people. Furthermore, if we take into consideration that their journeys across the Fertile Crescent were caused by famine, intergroup conflicts, the securing of wives, and--theologically explained--response to divine summons--all concerns other than the shepherding of animals--we could understand that they were migrators rather than strictly pastoral nomads pursuing a better life.

The causes of their emigration are as follows. According to Genesis, Abraham was called to leave his father's house by God. But, if we consider the cause of his departure from his father's house socio-economically, taking consideration of the fact that he divided his land (Genesis 13:5-12) with his cousin, Lot, because his tribe had grown too large to live in one place, we can assume that his journey was

¹James King West, Introduction to the Old Testament (New York: Macmillan, 1981) 118-123.

²Norman K. Gottwald, The Tribes of Yahweh (New York: Orbis Books, 1979) 35.

caused by the similar reason that he had with Lot. Also, stories regarding famine (Genesis 12:10, 26:1), indicate that Abraham went down to Egypt, and Isaac went to Abimelech, King of the Philistines, in Gegal, to purchase land to avoid a famine. In addition, the journeys of Isaac and Jacob were related to seeking wives and to securing prosperity for their descendents. Their geographical move was mainly for assuring survival. Accordingly, God's covenants with them are promises of blessing them to possess the land and to secure the prosperity for their descendents. The Bible records the conclusion of the patriarchal story in two speeches of Joseph to his brothers (45:5-7; 50:20f):

And now do not be distressed, or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life.
(Genesis 45:5)

As for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive,
As they are today. (Genesis 50:20)³ (underlines are mine)

In fact, through the patriarchal story, survival is a main concern. It describes the pursuing of land with plenty of water, and the preservation of their posterity.

A theological analysis shows promise and fulfillment. God called Abraham out of his inhabitance, saying "Go from your country and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation."⁴ This passage shows God's willingness to establish

³West, 125.

⁴Genesis 12:1a (RSV).

a nation out of the man, Abraham. Ethnically speaking, it is an attempt to prove the prototype of Israel. God's promise is related directly to the land promised for the establishment of a nation. Walter Brueggemann says in his book, The Land, "It is not the story of land possessed but the story of land promised."⁵

The theme, "the land promised," is kept constantly in the minds of the Israelites. In the patriarchal period, as we observed above, "the land promised" means the place in which their survival is secure by virtue of the source of water and the guarantee of posterity. In Exodus "the land promised" is the place in which they could savor religious, economic and political freedom. After they experienced the international power struggle through the vassal relationship with the stronger nations around them, the prophet, Isaiah, envisioned that "the land promised" is the world in which all creatures are to live in harmony (Isaiah 11:1-9, 65:17-25) under God's provision of righteousness. Finally, it gives a way to formulate "the kingdom of God" in the nascent Christian community. Fulfillment is on the way, along with the Israelites' social mutation. Walter Brueggemann draws similar insights described above and then emphasizes the fact that "the land promised" belongs to the dispossessed. He concludes his research of the concept of the land promised by applying it to the contemporary global vision. He says: "The gospel is about the coming of the new age, the new kingdom, the new land. In that context there is no anxiety, no

⁵Walter Brueggemann, The Land (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977) 20.

sorrow, there is only trust in the promise of a land of rest and joy."⁶

The Asian-Americans are immigrants in modern society as were the patriarchs in ancient society. They have immigrated because of the lopsided international economic balance and plan to pursue a better life. Basically, they are searching for survival in the post-industrial period. Instead of the famines suffered in Israel's patriarchal period, they were agonized by economic depression and social disorder in the global economic-political system. They are looking for a place to secure their economic activity. Most Asian-Americans report that their primary immigration desire is to provide a better lifestyle for their descendants. The prosperity of their posterity is a major concern for Asian-American immigrants as it was for the patriarchs. In this comparison between the Israelites' patriarchs and Asian-Americans, we find both of them to be migrants in search of assurance of survival as human beings, although their historical backgrounds are quite different. We have seen the theological interpretation of "the land promised." If the patriarchs' experiences provided the means to establish a nation in the ancient world, then the Asian-Americans' experience could become the basis of creating a new age for themselves in the modern world, with the promise that they too may be a light to all nations.

III. EXODUS

The story of the Exodus is contained in the books of Exodus,

⁶Ibid., 330.

Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, and Joshua. This story records events from the Exodus from Egypt to the entry into the Promised Land after the Israelites formed a confederacy under the covenant at Sinai. In this story, the faith of the Israelites was formed during and because of their journeys from Egypt to Sinai and Sinai to TransJordan.

According to the book of Exodus, chapter 1, the Israelites were afflicted economically and politically under the rule of the Egyptians. Because the Israelite population increased enough to pose a threat to the Egyptians, they put them into slavery and oppressed them with forced labor (Exodus 1:8-11). The more they were oppressed, the more the Israelites multiplied and spread (Exodus 1:12). The Egyptians became more ruthless. In addition to imposing hard labors, the Egyptians limited the numbers of babies the Israelites might have and permitted only baby girls to survive (Exodus 1:15-22).

In this story, we can assume that the traditional theme of the Exodus is the Israelites' liberation from social oppression. There is an indication that they were well fed during their sojourn in Egypt. Exodus 16:3 says:

The Israelites said to them, "If only we had died by the Lord's land in Egypt! There we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted, but you brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death."⁷

This passage shows that the initial cause of the Exodus was not survival,

⁷The Thompson Chain-Reference Bible (Indianapolis: Kirkbride Bible Company, 1983) 72.

as it appeared to be in the story of the patriarchs, but liberation from oppression. Had they been satisfied with the Egyptians treatment of them, they would not have needed to escape. Instead, as slaves, they groaned and cried out (Exodus 2:23). Although their basic needs were filled, they were exploited through slavery, social segregation (they were sent to Pithom and Pameses to build cities for the storage of Pharoah's grain), and discrimination against their right of procreation. The unquenched desire to escape from bondage grew as oppression increased. We must conclude that the motive of the Exodus was economic political liberation from the Egyptian oppression.

According to some Biblical scholars, the common belief that the twelve tribes as a whole took an initiation of their escape from Egypt is vague. Although the Scripture says the existence of the twelve tribes in Egypt (Exodus ch 1:1-7), scholars could find no record in any early literature of Egypt, of the exodus of the twelve tribes of Israelites. They assume that a few slaves escaped, formed a community outside of Egypt and became wanderers in the wilderness. Gottwald, a biblical historian, states, in his book, Tribes of Yahweh, that Moses' group was small, relatively homogeneous, and Yahwistic. The group was forged out of oppression and was immersed by later Yahwistic Israelites in Canaan. Historically, this small group became a part of greater Yahwistic Israel in Canaan.⁸

⁸Gottwald, 35-41.

We can see the necessity of forming a confederation of Yahwistic cultists in Sinai. According to the Scriptures, the Israelites were frequently attacked by surrounding tribes in the wilderness. Therefore, they established themselves as a unified group on the way to Canaan. This gives them an identity as the people of Yahweh--a nation, Israel. In this sense, their confederacy was a means of survival and manifests the importance of culture in forming a community.

If we compare the story of the Exodus to the Asian-American immigrant community, we can learn two things from the comparison. First, human beings need economic and political liberation--more than just the fulfillment of basic necessities in a complicated social system. Second, forming a community for a common interest improves chances of survival in a harsh political arena.

Asian-Americans are a minority in American society. Since they have immigrated to fill gaps in the American labor force, they have been subject to oppression as cheap labor. Their oppression has been similar, in some ways, to that of the Israelites in Egypt. Both groups became trapped in a substructure of social classes and felt it was essential to search for a just society.

Asian-Americans should also realize that, being a minority, they are vulnerable economically and politically and need to be protected from control by the majority. They need to consolidate to protect themselves and their right to be treated equally, just as the Israelites united and built a community strong enough to protect themselves from the surrounding tribes. Although Asian-Americans have diverse heritages and memories--

Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Philipino and so on—they need group solidarity and a new community. In the process of building a community through shared experiences, they will have to demonstrate that equal participation and just treatment is possible among diverse ethnic groups, which may model this possibility for a pluralistic American society.

IV. THE BABYLONIAN CAPTIVITY AND AFTER

Since the Israelites established an independent nation, their economic and political activity had been vigorous, nationally and internationally. Because of their political weakness, they had been under the suzerainty of some other Empires. There had been a conflict between politicians and prophets as to whether they keep a covenant with their God or lean on threatening Empires.

When Assyria ruled the Near East, the prophets, Amos and Hosea, worked actively in Israel, and Isaiah and Micah worked in Judah. In the northern kingdom of Israel, both Amos and Hosea acknowledged that Israel was in rapid decline due to their class struggle and the religious corruption and prophesized that the judgment of God was near. They called for justice in their society. Since the reign of Menahem (745-738 B.C.), the Israelites had been heavily taxed by the Assyrians. Political unrest had followed. After Menahem's son, Pakah, took a loyalty, he changed his father's favorable policies to be against the Assyrians, so Israel became a target of Assyria. Eventually, in 722, Israel became a protectorate and was ruled by the Assyrian governor.⁹

⁹West, 303-307.

Meanwhile, in Judah, King Ahaz did not cooperate with the coalition in the Syro-Ephraimitic crisis. Judah was not subject to being attacked by the Assyrians because of neutrality. When Sennacherib invaded Judah, the prophet Isaiah counseled King Hezekiah not to rush into dependence on Assyria. Furthermore, despite a general tendency to ask for help from Egypt and Babylonia, he was advised to remain neutral, and to rely on the "one sure source of strength,"¹⁰ Yahweh (Isaiah 31:1-9).

Throughout the Middle-Eastern power struggle, the prophets tended to teach that God was the only ruler over the earth. Strong nations were thought to be instruments through which God delivered judgments against sinful nations. Their faith and trust in God went beyond nationalistic connotations and became universal. This spirit was handed down through the classical prophets.

After Judah was totally deprived of political independence by the Babylonian Empire, her people were put into captivity in Babylonia in 587 B.C. The Israelites lost hope of finding eternal peace through dependence on stronger nations. In time, the power of the Babylonian Empire declined, and Persian arose as a new Empire in the Middle East. Unlike previous rulers the Persian control over occupied nations was very tolerant and allowed them to achieve a semi-independent national life. The exiled Israelites returned to their country, thinking that King Cyrus was a Messiah (Isaiah 45:1). But, their freedom from Babylonian

¹⁰Ibid., 330.

captivity is not the work of Cyrus but is God's redemptive work shown through the power of Cyrus of Persia (Isaiah 45). With this understanding, the Israelites saw a vision of universal redemption in which all people on the earth could live in peace. The author would like to call this vision the human being's spiritual liberation that would be the final solution for the international power struggle.

Deutero-Isaiah suggests that some payment must be made for redemption. The final salvation is not a romantic one. There needs to be a suffering community. The prophet Isaiah thought that the Israelite is a suffering servant to redeem all nations. Among Biblical scholars, there is a controversy whether the suffering servant is individual or collective. In the book of Deutero-Isaiah there are four poems concerning the suffering servant (Isaiah 42:1-4, 49:1-6, 50:4-9, 52:13-53:12). The servant in these poems is highly individualized. However, considering that they are poems and the Hebrews' manner of thought does not discern a collective sense from individual statements, many biblical scholars think that the servant is Israel, either the remnant or the whole. The main passages selected from two of the poems are as follows:

Faithfully he brings true justice;
he will neither waver, nor be crushed
until true justice is established on earth
for the islands are awaiting his law¹¹

His soul's anguish over
 he shall see the light and be content.
By his suffering shall my servant justify many
taking their faults on himself¹² (underlines are mine)

¹¹Isaiah 42:4 (Jerusalem Bible).

¹²Isaiah 53:11 (Jerusalem Bible).

One's suffering bears redemptive power for others. In a collective sense, a suffering community gives light to a new dimension for other communities. So it might be said that the Israelites' suffering in their international power struggle is a means of showing God's activity in the redemption of all human beings.

In this manner, contemporary Black theologians claim that their ethnic suffering carries the redeeming power of God's activity. Joseph Washington says in his book, The Politics of God, "If the Negro is the 'suffering servant,' God has called him not to make group differences irrelevant but to make him enriching for all humankind."¹³

Asian-Americans are one of the suffering communities in the contemporary world as we observed in chapter II. Their suffering is individual, social and international. Individually they have undergone cultural frustration and identity crises. Socially, racial discrimination and economic exploitation by the majority people have befallen them. During the depression in America, the economic activity of the immigrants was sacrificed to white laborers. They have been deeply injured by the alien land law, the policies of segregation in education and marriage, and the oriental exclusion laws. Furthermore, internationally, during armed conflict with the nations of origin of the Asian-American groups, the immigrants have been treated as aliens or foreigners, even though they had established citizenship. The Japanese internment camps during World War II have become a representative case.

¹³Joseph R. Washington, The Politics of God (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967) 160.

And American immigration policies toward Asian-Americans has been changed with the vicissitudes of American international relationships with their mother countries. Like the Israelites experienced international power conflicts with surrounding powers, the Asian-Americans have gone through similar experiences in living in America. The suffering of Asian-Americans is unique in light of their possible acknowledgement that there is no absolute political power which they could rely on, even if they are American citizens. They are a wandering people in the contemporary world.

If we expect that a pluralistic village-like world will come, sooner or later, Asian-Americans' sufferings could become a valuable resource in the vision of a global community. As the Israelites had a vision of redeeming all nations through their suffering, the Asian-American immigrant community, combined with other suffering communities, may look forward through suffering to the hope of improved conditions for all peoples. The sufferings of Asian-Americans could be a factor in the formation of their faith. The feeling of younger-generation Asian-Americans goes beyond being Americans and identifies them as human beings who concern suffering people in the contemporary world as the identity that Asian-Americans younger generations tend to define for themselves tells, observed in the previous chapter. They want to share their suffering and envision a new community inhabitable by all. This is a spiritual move through their suffering to broaden their perspective for others as the Israelites claimed universal redemption through their suffering.

V. PENTACOSTAL EVENT

This is the dividing point between Judaic history and the Christian era. It is a symbolic event of the birth of the nascent Christian community. After this, a few Jewish believers gave up their patriotic determinism and enlarged their view of God's redemptive work. They projected a new community in which "the kingdom of God" is for human beings of all nationalities and cultures. God's mission is to liberate humankind from suffering and sin.

Its historical backdrops are as follows. The Near East was conquered by Alexander the Great in B.C. 4. Since then the Israelites' territory had been ruled by successors of King Alexander. These rulers were faithful admirers to the Hellenistic culture. When Antiochus IV (175-163) ruled Palestine, the Jewish people grumbled about his Hellenistic policies. As a result, Antiochus ruined Jerusalem in 167 B.C. on his way home from a humiliating withdrawal from Egypt. He treated Jerusalem as an enemy city and issued an edict "forbidding the practice of Judaism in all its traditional forms: temple sacrifices, circumcision, sabbath observance, kosher restrictions, and possession of sacred books."¹⁴ The Jewish independence movement followed. The revolt led by "Maccabeus" recaptured Jerusalem in December, 164 B.C., and religious activity in the temple was revived.¹⁵

¹⁴West, 475.

¹⁵Ibid., 476-477.

After Palestine fell under control of the Roman Empire in 63 B.C., the conflict between Hellenism and Judaism was revived, particularly during Herod's regime (37-4 B.C.). Herod was devoted to Hellenism and recognized the Jewish religion.

Herod's vast building program, including pagan temples and Hellenistic gymnasia, clearly placed him among the hated Hellenizers who had played so malevolent a role in Israel's troubles during the preceding century. It is not surprising, therefore, that his one great contribution to Judaism, the rebuilding of the temples, should have been received with such mixed feelings.¹⁶

This was not satisfactory for the Israelites, so revolts were common until the fall of Jerusalem.

Apocalyptic literatures appeared because of the depressive social environment. Through the long period of colonialism and the influence of Hellenism, different religious groups appeared: Pharisees, Sadducees, Zealots and Essens. Because many compromises between the Roman rulers and the high priests, the aristocracy became hypocritical. Distrust in the Jewish community increased sharply. The Israelites' hope for reconstruction in their religious, political and cultural affairs was shattered. The apocalyptic message supplanted their depression.

Into this setting, Jesus came from the rural area of Galilee, proclaiming the kingdom of God. His mission was to liberate His people. He consoled the oppressed, the poor and the sick, and pointed out the hypocracies of the ruling class, and to let them repent and envision "the kingdom of God." He died on the cross and thereby became the protagonist of the Pentacostal event, which created a new human community.

¹⁶Ibid., 506.

The book of Acts describes the birth of the new community this way:

When suddenly they heard what sounded like a powerful wind from heaven, the noise of which filled the entire house in which they were sitting; and something appeared to them that seemed like tongues of fire; these separated and came to rest on the head of each of them. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak¹⁷ foreign languages as the Spirit gave them the gift of speech.

The central message is that the Holy Spirit rules the lives of all the people (Acts 2:5-12).

I would like to clarify the difference between the sign of the Holy Spirit at Pentacost and that of the Corinthian church, which, at first glance, look alike. There is a difference. At Pentacost the tongues of fire represent many languages which will reach out from peoples coming from abroad. In the Corinthian church, speaking in a tongue is speaking to God, not to men (I Corinthian 14:2). In Corinth, Greek cultic practices flourished. Their indigenous religious practices were simply interpreted as the work of the Holy Spirit. Corinthian Christians brought them to the Judeo-Christian community. No other church at that time was reported to have this kind of belief in the Holy Spirit. It is assumed that the sign of the Holy Spirit at Pentacost was a symbolic expression of the beginning of a mission for all human beings.

After this event, the pentacostal community, as the nascent Christian community, was formed. According to the description in Acts, this community is not only a sharing community (Acts 2:43-47) but is

¹⁷ Acts 2:1-4 (Jerusalem Bible).

also an eschatological community, as shown in Peter's speech concerning this event. It started a new era in which the kingdom of God is being realized. The Israelites' apocalyptic vision of human history is transformed. The new community sprouted from the hard ground of the Israelites' depression. This community has no nationality or borders, but is supported by faith in the love and justice of Jesus Christ. Because of their acknowledgement of love and justice and the need for proclaiming peace to all people, they shared their property with the needy, and because of their proclamation of final salvation, they are characterized as an eschatological community. They had learned through suffering that there is no peace in depending on other stronger nations and preserving their own religious and cultural tradition with patriotic vigor.

In the contemporary global crisis, we may feel that the apocalyptic dark clouds hang over us, just as believers in the nascent Christianity might have felt. Materialistic expansion comes automatically in this age, and the inner life of many modern people has become desolate as alienation and loneliness increases. Because of the lopsided international trade system, people in depressed nations and subclasses in advanced countries are being exploited. Because of careless use of the chemicals and petroleum products of modern technology, the global ecological system is now threatened to the point at which all living things are endangered. The arms race between the stronger nations makes nuclear destruction of the world seem possible. Even if nuclear war can be prevented by destroying nuclear warheads by laser-laden satellites, nuclear winter could still destroy the global ecological

system, according to the recent report concerning the role of nuclear ashes and dusts. This appalling situation on earth could become worse unless modern people begin to see love and justice as an absolute mandate. This destructive global situation has been created by Western culture-oriented development. The results have not been only destructive. There has been a large contribution to human welfare in numerous ways; a fair representative democratic government, the communistic ideals, leisure life, an efficient transportation system, and an affluent life including plenty of food and other luxurious adjuncts. But, figuratively speaking, we seem to be at the end of the road. The present tendency of development for human welfare needs radical changes.

In the contemporary world, people need to share their experiences and cultural heritage and seek a life that is better conditioned for the coming generations. We must all give up our pride and all thought of one's cultural superiority and work together to build a new vision.

Asian-Americans have come to live in America with good expectations. Since America has inherited the European culture, or at least, the American culture has been greatly affected by European culture, they have been treated as "aliens," who are affected by different value systems. Because of the pride of descendants of Europeans, they have been imperialistic in their economic, religious, political and cultural activities in the contemporary global arena. Asian-Americans have been oppressed by their activities. If Europeans and Asians are to find a way to live in harmony in this God-given land, they must learn to share as the Pentacostal community did.

The Asian-Americans could make contributions from their social experiences and cultural heritage, but their bi-cultural experiences are not being engrafted into the western culture. Their contributions lie in transforming their suffering and conflicts and amalgamating the two cultures into their lifestyle. In this kind of transformation, the Asian-American immigrant community could, perhaps, share the unique aspects of their heritage.

In this chapter, we have found some possible factors for Asian-Americans' faith to be formed from their experiences as they compare with the Israelites' experiences and faith. Asian-Americans' eagerness to survive in the foreign land, their suffering, socially and economically, and their possible contributions to the contemporary world are such factors. In these unique elements of their faith, we see the emergence of transformative power in their life and a vision of a better life in the coming village-like global community.

Chapter 4

SIGNIFICANCE OF ASIAN-AMERICAN IMMIGRANT COMMUNITY IN THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD I SOCIO-CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE

I. INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapters we observed the experience of Asian-Americans and their would-be transformative power through their suffering in studying the Scripture, by observing faith as a response to one's socio-historical environment. Asian-Americans are one of many suffering groups in the contemporary world. So, characteristically, they would have tried to transform their environment into a better conditioned one. If this is so, the question is how they give an impact on the life of modern people and what cultural heritage they would bring to envision a better society.

In this chapter, I am going to examine this question in the context of the self-indulgent materialistic modern society.

II. SPIRITUAL STRENGTH THROUGH SUFFERING

Looked at from our present perspective, the contemporary social problems have developed from the lopsided balance between haves and have-nots in national and international relations. Throughout history this injustice has been a central theme. Marxism calls it "class struggle." It was slave owners versus slaves in the ancient Greek age, landlords versus serfs in the middle ages, capitalists versus laborers in the modern capitalistic age. This dichotomous social stratification

is analyzed economically. Reinhold Niebuhr identifies two manifestations of capitalistic class struggle:

The medieval social organization was a personal one. The relations between squire and serf, between master and artisans, were direct, and sometimes intimate.... The rise of a technological civilization increased the centralisation of ownership and power it destroyed the sense of responsibility of the owner, and obscured the human factors in industrial relations by the mechanism of stocks ownership and the technique of mass production.... It therefore intensified the conflict and antagonism between the classes, by drawing individuals of a given economic status more definitely into a self-conscious social and political group and by giving them organs for the expression of a common group interest.¹

This means that contemporary underprivileged people through group consciousness have acquired more political power than was ever held by the underprivileged in the past. The unjust social system has been transformed into an appropriate structure in which the right to claim a contribution to society is preserved at least to some degree.

The pattern of change in social and political power has given more influence to the underprivileged people from era to era in a way that permits reforms to be initiated by these groups. In ancient times and the Middle Ages, political revolts were initiated by the king's relatives and subjects. The majority of people were merely pursuing their survival in the vicissitudes of royal political changes. After industrialization, the middle class initiated economic activity and gained enough effective political power to change their social system so their profits could be protected. Along with the rise of the middle

¹Reinhold Niebuhr, Moral Man and Immoral Society (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1960) 143.

class, the political system has also been changed from an aristocracy to a democracy. As a result of the democratic movement, the underprivileged people (who dominate in the contemporary social structure) have had minimum opportunities for education and thus "a perspective upon political and economical facts, which the landless and propertyless classes of other ages lacked."² Their participation in economic and political activity has been broadened to the whole spectrum of social relationships. So, at least at the conscious level, the right of the underprivileged (the majority in any society) to demand their share has become recognized in the contemporary era.

This phenomena is obvious in the global dimension. Since the world has become a global village through the development of the communication system, the transportation system and the increase of international trade between nations, the self-consciousness of the underprivileged people has increased rapidly world-wide. Their problems are no longer limited to each independent nation, but are deeply connected with global trade, whatever issues they may be. The people of the third world are recognizing that they have been exploited by the advanced countries. In the manufacturing process, their labor and national resources have been sold at considerably lower prices than those of the advanced countries.

The liberation theology in Latin America has come out of the third world recognition that their people have the right to demand their

²Ibid., 142.

proper share in global economic activity. Their self-consciousness is growing out of their grass-roots communities and is becoming more visible now than in any other period. The toiling masses are groaning for liberation. The other recent emerging theological thinking is women's liberation theology. Rosemary Ruether, one of the outstanding feminists, claims that women have been exploited in the dualistic Western world, and they are the first and final proletariats. She puts this thought in this way,

Since women's work is invisible and, at the base, unpaid, this handicap upon women will be rationalized as a difference of nature and temperament, dictated by biology rather than recognized as the effects of a systematic work relation. The educational and cultural apparatus of society will continue to be bent to forcing women to be resigned to this role, as their nature and destiny, and to tailor their expectations accordingly. Males will be taught to be the adventurers and world conquerers, without noticing the way these roles are erected upon a pyramid of female labor.³

The social conflicts hidden under the veil of ideology and economic theory have recently been uncovered in greater degree. In Asia, the Minjung theology has been forged from a struggle similar to that of Latin America by recognizing that the underprivileged are in the majority. This says that the experience of the oppressed people could transform the current unjust social trend into a just order if it is considered that the language of the oppressed people is messianic.⁴ In a word, the oppressed people, not privileged politicians and the middle

³Rosemary Ruether, New Woman New Earth (New York: Seabury Press, 1975) 181.

⁴Yong Bok Kim (ed.), Minjung Theology (Singapore: Commission on Theological Concerns, 1981) 115.

class, are being looked at as the ones who are able to change this world.

What I am saying in this section is that the time has come for the underprivileged people to demand their right to equal treatment in the contemporary world as the middle class recognized their right to protect their privileges during the eighteenth century rise of industrialization, and the royal family and its subjects recognized their right to set their royalty apart from their relatives in ancient times. In a word, the oppressed might be a community of faith in the present, whose transformative power lies in their experiences.

Asian-Americans have experienced contemporary global economic and political conflicts. As we observed in chapter II, they are oppressed in the environment of the western world historically. So, in their experience they could become a faith community and shed light on the social environment, if their self-consciousness as the oppressed people gives them enough confidence to become the subject of contemporary history.

Since the rapid development of industrialization, the human environment has become secure, so that life can be enjoyed more than has been possible in the past. Leisure has increased, and the struggle for survival has diminished. Contemporary people live in a pleasure-oriented culture. The middle class dominates today's social and cultural world, and most people consider themselves as belonging to the middle class. One of the negatives results of a pleasure-oriented society is that many have lost an instinctive challenge of human beings, and simply try to

maintain the status quo. For some, this has become basic to their satisfaction-oriented life. They avoid any confrontations with suffering. In a word, they have lost the transforming power to build a more appropriate social environment. Along with this, the spiritual dynamic is being lost in their life that is present-oriented. Endurance for overcoming suffering out of the problem-laden human environment is lacking.

However, within the life of Asian-American community, the spiritual dynamic is very much alive. Although they have been mistreated by the majority group in America, they have challenged with endurance to transform their environment into a more suitable one for themselves. Most sociologists report that they are hardworking people, no matter what their social status may be. An important aspect of the growth of the Asian-American influence on the self-indulgent community is the spiritual strength that has been necessary for them to continue to effect contemporary social life.

III. CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE

Since the rise of industrialism and technocracy, the social system has been changed so much that, except for a few specialists, I believe that many people are unable to keep up with the rapidity of its progress. Small community life has been turned into urban life, and, ironically, competition in labor is now between man and machines rather than between men. Materialism has expanded so far that it is impossible to decide if it enhances the quality of life or not. In the early industrial society, it had contributed to achieving a comfortable

life style by producing home appliances, communication systems, and transportation networks. Now, its products seem to over-supply the necessities of life. Commercialism has initiated a supply and demand system to make profits for sustaining contemporary commercial activities. The present post-industrial society seems much like a machine rather than an art in which the quality of life is expressed. Unfortunately, the effects of our commercialism-oriented post-industrial system appears to have touched every corner of our world. Active international trade undergirds the present global econo-political activities. In the contemporary world, people are no longer human beings that they are meant to be but rather a means of increasing productivity. Often replaced by machines, they have lost many human relationships and have been deprived of the right to quality of life. Mainly, the agony of modern people is alienation. The decreasing self-esteem (due to the fact that people commonly have to wrestle mostly with machines and cope with an unchanging social system) and loneliness (owing to the lack of human relationships) have, paradoxically, deprived them of their deserved quality of life with the abundance of modern productivity. In this situation, the question should be, "who or what might stop this machine-like society and change it to being a responsible society for all?" It has been rolling down the hill of modern civilization with incredible speed. It needs to be changed gradually. It cannot be changed suddenly through any kind of response to its long history.

Today's global tendency is dehumanizing and alienating human beings. Intimate human relationships are needed, as well as caring at the very core of the human environment. In this desperate need, the

function of one's family as a basic social unit is going to take a significant role of human relationship in one's materialistic life.

At this point, the author would like to consider the family structure and the culture it produces and show how the Western family system compares with that of the Orientals. In research done on the Asian-American family structure, most sociologists point out that it is authoritative and therefore unsuitable in the individualistic American society. My opinion of the Asian-American family structure is somewhat positive, although there are many variations in structure. Saying that the Oriental family structure is authority-oriented is a shallow analysis that loses merit when the dynamics of family structure are considered. Even though the system seems to be empowered by authority, there are integral responsibilities for all family members. Here I introduce William T. Liu's diagram comparing the Oriental and Western family structure,

Oriental; Father - Son	Western; Husband - Wife
Continuity	Discontinuity
Inclusivity	Exclusivity
Asexual	Sexual ⁵

This is an analysis of the same dyadic relationship in two different cultural contexts--the structural difference between the open and the closed nuclear family. In this diagram I observe the oriental family emphasis on the family tree in the sense of diachronological history through the emphasis on the Father-Son relationship and group solid-

⁵Russel Endo, Stanley Sue, and Nathaniel N. Wagner (ed.), Asian-Americans: Social and Psychological Perspective (Palo Alto: Science & Behavior Books, 1980) 279.

arity. The Western family lacks this. In other words, the Oriental family emphasis is on group solidarity, while the Western family stresses individuality. In this sense, we can assume that Orientals tend to have more group responsibility than Westerners. The Orientals' individual activities must be interpreted in relation to their group responsibility.

Since the family is a unit of society and culture, we could define the mode of culture through observing the corresponding family structure. From my observation of family systems above, I would define the mode of Oriental culture as a 'we' culture and that of Western culture as an 'I' culture. In the Western culture, individualism has been emphasized in creativity and autonomy. The nurturing attitude toward children requires discipline to let them be mature enough to survive, individually, in social life. Because of this nurturing attitude, Westerners have been raised to be progressive and aggressive. If they fail to succeed in their given environment, they tend to feel guilty because of their failure to behave as expected. Because of the lack of group solidarity, those who fail need dramatic change to renew their confidence. Otherwise, they suffer from long-term frustration. Western Christianity, therefore, has been an atoning cult so that failing individuals may have "a new being" existentially. In Western culture, the 'I' enables a "guilt" culture. "Shame," on the other hand, is characteristic of the Oriental culture. Failing individuals acknowledge their failure in the spirit of group solidarity. For them, to overcome "shame" creates an eagerness to keep up with their responsibility as a member of the group. They need endurance to fulfill what

others expect from them. Accordingly, the Oriental family cares. They raise their children to be responsible or to fulfill expectations for all relatives and others of the same ethnic background. For this reason, Oriental culture has been stable and progressive, although one might feel that its development has been slow and traditional.

Asian-American families still maintain their oriental family system. If we look at their Asian-Americans socialization in American society, we find that they try to survive through group solidarity and are successful. They have not lost their humanistic relationships in the American materialistic society that sometimes causes alienation of individuals. Because of this beneficial factor in their family structure, they have been eager to live with endurance to catch up with their envisioned social expectation. As sociologists say, they have been very successful in enhancing their environment. Their history is well organized. In a word, in the Asian-American family system, group solidarity and endurance have assured their success.

Another threat to modern civilization is the deterioration of the global ecological system due to the industrial development. Many modern thinkers point out that the root of this problem is in Western dualistic thinking, influenced by the Greek mode of philosophy that is a mechanistic theory of nature. Charles Birch picks up the thought of Descartes living in 17C as significant in modern dualism. He said:

So Descartes postulated two sorts of entities, matter and mind. Man was a machine but with the difference that he had a mind 'annexed' to it (from the character of animals). Hence was born the Cartesian

Doctrine of the bifurcation of nature which has had a profound influence on human thought ever since.⁶

This thought led to mechanism in biology, deism in theology, and the ground of modern scientific development that has lacked an ecological understanding of nature. In Western thought, nature has been an object to be exploited. It has been seen as mechanistic or inanimate, not as a living organism that constantly responds and influences its parts. Since the time of industrialization in Europe, the global ecosystem has deteriorated. As a consumption-oriented life style has flourished due to the outgrowing supply and demand economic system, every corner of the earth has been subject to exploitation in order to meet the demands of the present global commercialism. As a result, nutrient-laden top soils have been lost by the use of chemical fertilizers, dense forests have been replaced with fields of tea, tobacco, pineapple, and other products, and pastures used for commercial herds. This has happened most frequently in third world countries, particularly in Latin America. And air and water have been contaminated by toxic chemicals, so that some living species are threatened with extermination or decreased numbers year after year.

The global community faces an ecological crisis. Many conservationists suggest various ways of preserving nature: 1) restrict economic activities by increasing taxes on items disturbing the ecosystem, 2) build irrigation systems, 3) enforce proper use of forests,

⁶Charles Birch, Nature and God (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1965) 17.

and 4) urge the build-up of small communities instead of expanding urbanization. Ideologically, most of them blamed Western dualistic, mechanistic and anthropocentric world view for the present global ecological deterioration. In the world view of Westerners, the importance of being in harmony with nature and recognizing all living organisms in the earth as interconnected and interdependent have failed. However, the Western dualistic view is not the end of its peoples' thought. Along with their social change, Westerners have recognized the necessity of an ecological world view.

Unfortunately, the present global industrial life has been led mainly by people in the Western hemisphere. Orientals have emphasized the idea that nature is in harmony, that human beings are a part of nature, and have not been allowed to participate fully in the development of the present global social life. Their intimacy with nature has been nourished throughout their long persistent history. In their civilization, life depends on agriculture and their great wholistic faith. In early times, Oriental people were immersed in Taoistic thinking. "They let the world follow 'its way,' its Tao, which is the best possible when nothing interferes."⁷ This Taoistic thought upheld a non-anthropocentric way of relating to nature. It has been a basic flow of Oriental consciousness as a root of their historic character.

In Confucianism, despite its emphasis on socio-legalistic discipline Taoistic thought is alive. Andrew Chih describes this in

⁷Lawrence S. Thompson, The Chinese Way in Religion (Encino: Dickenson Publishing Company, 1973) 63.

this way:

The same attitude of gratitude toward Heaven, parents, and nature generated the moral ideal called filial piety. This ideal is the natural consequence of gratitude toward those who give life, be it God, man, or nature. The power of the eternal principle consists in its eternal return to the origin.⁸

Oriental Weltanschauung, traditionally speaking, is a wholistic formulation in which all living things are considered interconnected. If such a world view had been incorporated in the development of modern industrialization, the present world ecological situation would have produced different results. As Westerners acknowledge, the present world needs ecological concern, and a recognition of the indispensibility of nature in the environment. In both practical and ideological senses a response to the ecological crisis has to be executed.

The Asian-American immigrant community has something to contribute for deterring the present global ecological deterioration. They carry a nature-loving heritage. Their strong inheritance of being in harmony with nature permeates their personality and family tradition. Most of the early Asian-Americans worked in the agricultural industry in the Western area of America without any difficulty in skills or intimacy with nature. Asian-Americans recognize the importance of the natural ecosystem. They care about nature. Therefore, their community could be a community of faith in contemporary history.

⁸Andrew Chih, Chinese Humanism (Taiwan: Fu Jen Catholic University Press, 1981) 204.

Chapter 5

SIGNIFICANCE OF ASIAN-AMERICAN IMMIGRANT COMMUNITY
IN THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD II
THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

I. INTRODUCTION

Since the world has become a global society, Christians have had to recognize other faiths, and consequently, reform doctrines and theologies. Schleiermacher, a theologian, was a product of eighteenth century European pietism and rationalism. He viewed Christianity as a religion that was universal from the deistic viewpoint. His theology was based on religious experience. His universal religion is expressed in his term "absolute dependence upon infinite being." He took his authoritative note away from Christianity. For him, Christianity that was once thought to be the religion for all is considered to fit into the category of a socio-cultural religion. Schleiermacher's analysis of religious thought in Christianity makes it possible to speculate on a comparative study of religions and to reconsider some aspects of Christian faith. Since World War I, the existential understanding of faith has been dominant. Karl Barth, as an initiator in this field, emphasized confessional faith in Christianity, regardless of social and cultural differences. To him, so far as Christianity contains truth by itself, it is viewed as the unique revelation of God.¹ This thought

¹John B. Cobb Jr., Christ in a Pluralistic Age (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975) 49.

takes the road a little bit off the belief that every religion is unique to its socio-cultural environment in the liberal theological trend. It tends to be exclusive to other living faiths. This exclusivism can be traced to the Orthodox belief in the Middle Ages in Europe, which has led the way for other religions as "a preparation for the Gospel" in the ecumenical movement in the present neo-orthodox view. It is a Christianity-centered attempt to dialogue with other living faiths. However, since the world becomes pluralistic, this view has been reconsidered by rethinking the meaning of Christology and the particularity of the other living faiths. So, in the first part of this chapter, I will attempt to examine how Asian-Americans would overcome conflicts among living faiths in their cultural experience.

Meanwhile, in the contemporary theological perspectives along with their biblical understandings, I will try to posit what theological perspective Asian-Americans would share in the second part of this chapter.

II. BEYOND RELIGIOUS EXCLUSIVISM

The religious experiences of Asian-Americans have something to contribute to the dialogue among living faiths. The identity "Asian-American" implies two cultural reservoirs; Oriental and Western. Asian-American religious consciousness is de facto rooted in Oriental civilization, but living in America has added elements of Christianity which expand the Oriental religious experience. Most Asian-Americans have become Christians, because America is Christianity-oriented. However,

although they are followers of Jesus Christ, their belief is apparently different from that of Westerners, owing to their different cultural background. Their religious expressions are somewhat oriental. Imperialistic missionary thought has faded. The thought was that to become Christian meant discarding one's Oriental culture and adopting a westernized lifestyle. Asian-Americans have now begun to recognize their rich cultural and religious traditions. Alan S. Wong says,

A resurgence of confucian ideals may very well be an antidote to our merely materialistic and technological culture. We must declare that our Christianity is an incomplete one and that we may try to extend it into Christian completion. This does not mean a disregard for the Christian heritage of the West. It does mean taking it seriously in an Asian setting. It will result in an enriching, not an impoverishing, of the whole Church.²

In the religious experience of the Asian-American, Western Christianity is challenged to seek a more adequate form of faith. It is not a bizzare attempt to apply one's religious tradition to Christian theology.

Christianity has been reformulated to include various philosophical thoughts and other belief systems such as Greek thought, the Persian view of the world, enlightenment philosophy, and so on.

The difficulty that Asian-Americans have in applying their cultural and religious richness to Christianity is Christology in the neo-orthodox belief in which Christ is the only figure who has slavific authority. There has not been any authoritative figure through whom one can be saved in Oriental religious experience. For this reason, for those who have been raised in the Oriental environment, Christology in

²Alan S. Wong, "Indigenization - Liberation of the Chinese American Churches," in Roy Sano (ed.), The Theologies of Asian Americans and Pacific Peoples (Berkeley: ACTS, 1977) 107.

neo-orthodox thought is a stumbling block. Psychologically, it is a belief forced into the religious experience of Orientals rather than a confessional belief that neo-orthodox thought originally initiates. Having faith is fundamentally confessional, at least when one accepts a certain religion as one's own. If its character is exclusive, any cultural dialogue that includes one's previous religious experience could be secondary or subversive. Especially for those who are of Oriental owatage, even though Christianity has been transformed through Western cultural development, its formulated doctrine is untouchable because Christianity is the religion brought to them by Western missionaries. If Orientals believe that God has cherished their cultural and religious life, they cannot help but weigh their cultural and religious life as significant as that of Westerners. The Asian-Americans need to understand that the image of Jesus Christ is different from that of their doctrinal figure, and then the relationship between Christ and culture must be examined.

John Cobb studied the pluralistic view of living faith seeking the proper or practical understanding of Christology in the contemporary secular and pluralistic world. In the introduction of his book, he argues that Christ cannot play a repressive role in saying,

If Christ supremely important for Christians and if Buddha is supremely important for Buddhists, and if Christ and Buddha are different, then it seems that Christians must close themselves to the full meaning of the Buddhist claim, and vice versa, and that the thrust toward openness, inclusiveness, and universality that is present in both Christ and Buddha must be thwarted for the sake of mutual toleration. But when Christ becomes a principle of closed-

ness, exclusiveness, and limitation, he ceases to be what is most important for the Christian and the appropriate expression of the efficacy of Jesus.³ In short, what would then be called Christ is in fact Antichrist.

He states that the imperialistic image of Christ, which has been a major element in mission activity abroad, must become the image of creative transformation in this secular and pluralistic age. Christ is a force that will influence all human life. John Cobb somewhat agrees with Tillich's theological methodology "correlation," in which the meaning of Christ is the answer to human problems in every stage of human history, but he asserts that the process is accelerated and criticizes Tillich's existential emphasis and his concept of Christ as a final answer.⁴ His image of Christ as creative transformation reveals that there is a force in process to transform present human history and create a better future. If we adopt Cobb's thought, we can talk about the immanence of Christ in the experience of Asian-Americans. As the Asian-American is a new identity vulnerable to new experiences, creative transformation will affect his/her social life. Within the unique religious experience of Asian-Americans, confrontations with living faiths in the global religious consciousness transform their faith into a more appropriate system for modern society.

Richard Niebuhr examines the relation between culture and Christian faith in his book "Christ and Culture." The first type of

³Cobb, 19.

⁴Ibid., 21-22.

faith which he discusses is a sectarian view in which everything in culture is understood to be evil, requiring Christians to withdraw from culture. There is an ascetic tendency to withdraw the Christian community from the major culture. The second type is the culturalist view. This view has "no great tension between the church and the world, the social laws and the gospel, the working of divine grace and human efforts, the ethics of salvation and the ethics of social conservation or progress."⁵ The characteristic American civil religion can be an example of this view. The first and second types lost their dynamic interaction between Christ and culture. So, he considered three alternative thought patterns. The third one is the thought of synthesists like Thomas Aquinas. In Aquinas' hierarchical system of theology, Christ is posted above culture and at the same time interrelated with culture. In this view, Christianity was institutionalized in the medieval social structure. It is difficult to discern the historical relativity of thought like a culturalist type as we see medieval theocratic society. In this type, what is relative could be absolute or vice versa. The fourth type is from a dualistic view of Christ and culture. Like the sectarian view, the dualists think culture contains an environment in which man can be easily corrupted. But, unlike the sectarians, dualists insist that God calls them to be in culture, like the pure soul in the earthen vessel. So, paradoxically, as redeemed, they recognized their call to live in the evil culture. This view is shown clearly in

⁵Richard Niebuhr, Christ and Culture (New York: Harper & Row, 1975) 83.

Luther's concept of believers, "simul justus at peccator," which means a man is, "at one and the same time, righteous and a sinner."⁶ The fifth type--the one that represents Niebuhr's theological position--is the view of conservationists acknowledging Christ as the transformer in culture. Their understanding of culture is more positive and hopeful than the dualists. To conservationists, culture is changeable through man's constant repentant action within culture. Their theological emphasis is on God's creation in understanding that the human being, who is created, works in a created world rather than on redemption through Christ's atonement which dualists emphasize in their theological themes. Therefore, the dualists posit God's dramatic intervention in human history, the conservationists cherish the divine possibility of a present renewal. Their view is temporal rather than spacial. Richard Niebuhr compares the five types:

For the exclusive Christian, history is the story of a rising church or Christian culture and a dying pagan civilization; for the cultural Christian, it is the story of the spirit's encounter with nature; for the synthesist, it is a period of preparation under law, reason, gospel, and church for an ultimate communion of the soul with God; for the dualist, history is the time of struggle between faith and unbelief, a period between the giving of the promise of life and its fulfillment. For the conservationist, history⁷ is the story of God's mighty deeds and of man's responses to them.

The conservationists believe that culture can be transformed in the interrelation between God's work and man's involvement in it. Culture is not identified with Christ, as the dualists believe, but is led

⁶Paul Althaus, The Theology of Martin Luther (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979) 242.

⁷Niebuhr, 194-195.

by Christ, who works through culture, Actually, the image of Christ is different from the contents of culture, and yet the image of Christ can be that of a transformer in culture. This fifth type is more appropriate to attenuate the exclusiveness of Christianity in the contemporary pluralistic age than other dualistic or synthetic views of the relationship between Christ and culture.

Christianity has been nurtured in the thought of Western civilization. From the beginning the combined thought of the Persians (apocalyptic), Greeks (salvation through a spiritual medium), and Jews (the cultic tradition), with Christianity has been in contact with medieval thought and anthropocentric enlightenment philosophies in Europe. So it is not a distortion and prejudice to label Christianity a western religion. Richard Niebuhr's explanation concerning the relationship between Christ and culture was done within the analysis of western faith. This gives an impression that his image of Christ, the transformer of culture, may be trapped within the understanding of the western-oriented culture.

However, for the Asian-Americans who have a dualistic perspective on culture, Christ is understood to be a transformer, not only to Western culture, but also to Oriental culture to achieve a more appropriate society. If Christ is understood in one culture, whatever image He has, it is likely to be indoctrinated. But in the dualistic perspective of the Asian-Americans' religious experience, Christ is better understood a transformer, not an object. The Asian-American is a hyphenated identity that has two cultural reservoirs. This identity,

bearing a would-be transformed culture, may help the image of Christ to become universally accepted in response to the present pluralistic tendency. It could, potentially, go beyond the present dominant westernized culture in demythologizing the elements of western culture in Christianity. In a word, its faith can be formed beyond exclusiveness along with the Western culture. In Richard Niebuhr's posthumous publication, The Responsible Self, edited by his disciples, considering human responsiveness as a starting point of human responsibility, he signifies all religious roles in human history as their own reflections on our contemporary consciousness. He said:

The great religions in general, and Christianity in particular, make their not least significant attack on this universal human ethos by challenging our ultimate historical myth. They do present new laws; they do present to us new ideals. But beyond all this they make their impact on us by calling into question our whole conception of what is fitting--that is, of what really fits in--by questioning our picture of the context into which we now fit our actions.

So far as "all life has the character of responsiveness"⁹ in today's social context, Asian-Americans, in their dualistic religious view, are capable of responding more broadly and intensively to our contemporary reflection on exclusiveness in Christianity. Asian-Americans have an enriched oriental religious experience that has its own reflection on our environment.

There have been several dominant faiths in each stage of oriental history: Taoism, seeking harmony with nature in well-balanced

⁸Richard Niebuhr, The Responsible Self (New York: Harper & Row, 1978) 107.

⁹Ibid., 46.

universal interrelatedness; Confucianism, emphasizing social discipline in the family connection and the social system; Buddhism from the Braman religion, seeking enlightenment in the world that was thought to be the illusion of desires; and primitive beliefs such as totemism and shamanism, that were common to all ancient peoples. All of these elements of diverse faith have enriched the culture of the oriental people. Unlike Westerners, for whom Christianity, out of Judaism, has been a dominant religious role, Asians have rich experiences with various living faiths. Lawrence S. Thompson says,

In China conflict is certainly not unknown, but it is less well defined, and, in using the term to describe Buddhism's relation to native ideologies, we should be warned at the start that it is not quite comparable with the conflict, let us say, between the early Christian community and the Roman emperors, in which context the slogan was born that "the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church." One of the Chinese religions has, to my knowledge, produced an extensive martyrology, and this illuminates in a striking way their different notion of conflict. If, as their world view describes it, Ultimate Reality is completely contained within the framework of the self-created, self-sustaining natural-social order, with its immanent principle of operation, the Tao, then all conflicts appearing on the periphery, since they cannot originate outside the order of Reality, well, if followed back to the Source or Center, be found to be in harmony.¹⁰

In this way, the Orientals' wholistic view of the world has been maintained. Even though an oriental may identify himself or herself as a Buddhist, there are various religious traditions in his or her social life. Asian-Americans, rooted in the Oriental cultural tradition have begun to have a new religious experience in their contact with the

¹⁰ Lawrence S. Thompson, The Chinese Way in Religion (Encino: Dickenson, 1973) 63.

American culture, in which pluralism and the equality of all human beings are basic foundations. Asian-Americans, as a new group in the contemporary global context, have a potentiality in their religious experience to form a faith that goes beyond religious exclusiveness.

III. SEARCHING FOR A JUST AND SUSTAINABLE SOCIETY

In Biblical study, Bultmann introduced an existential understanding of the Scripture, using the terminology Sitz im Leben as his resource. His tool, "form criticism," used in studying the Gospels, follows the scientific critical method as a way to find the formation of faith in nascent Christianity in its socio-cultural environment. He thinks that the believers' existential decision in the nascent Christianity can occur, in the same way, in any social environment, if we demythologize the early Christians' Weltanschauung and apply their kerygma to our context. His emphasis is on the existential dimension of human life. Reinhold Niebuhr recognized social evil as collective egoism rather than the existential outcome of the political dimension in human life.¹¹ If individual egoism turns to group pride, the group is more arrogant, hypocritical, self-centered and ruthless in the pursuit of its ends than the individual had been. Since the nomadic lifestyle was transmuted to the agrarian economy, the social system has become complicated in order to distribute freedom and property, from which power comes. The history of slavery is closely related to the use of property.

¹¹ Reinhold Niebuhr, Moral Man and Immoral Society (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1960) xx.

Before the agrarian culture was established, the captives of war were killed. But, with the growth of agriculture, the labor of captives became useful, and they were enslaved rather than destroyed. The exploitation of people in social stratification gradually became systematic. People's equal rights disappeared gradually. Since the agrarian culture began, the history of humanity has been econo-oriented. Those who have economic power have affected the social power structure. As the aristocratic polity was broken, the democratic system was adopted by the powerful middle class merchants in the 18C. Nobody escaped from the social structure, but were absorbed in the will-to-power of groups which tried to protect their profit and security against other groups. At the national level, the strongest economic groups formed an oligarchical political structure, and at the international level, the world econo-political structure became anarchy. Since some nations are more powerful than others, they try to destroy the international anarchy by effective imperialism.

Soelle, a Biblical scholar, develops her concern for the community environment by questioning what is authentic life for all human beings. She recognizes, considering that we are all connected with each other and the social environment, no one can be saved alone. Since Heidegger's authenticity influenced Bultmann's Biblical hermeneutic, Bultmann interprets the Bible existentially to seek the authentic life of individuals. Bultmann regards this context as a personal Sitz im Leben. But Soelle says,

Subjectivity is injected into even this process of social understanding, but not for the purpose of seeking understanding and

faith for itself alone: rather it belongs in and calls for the indivisible salvation of the whole world.¹²

She understands the political environment as her most applicable context for realizing God's redemption. She agrees with Bultmann's demythologization of the Bible, but questions Bultmann's nonmythological understanding of the nexus of natural science. She argues, "Is it less mythological to imagine that wars, hunger, and conditions that intensify our world's neuroses are simply determined by fate?"¹³ She thinks that Bultmann ignores the socio-political environment by emphasizing the existential decision of believers to be authentic in their search for the Kerygma. Soelle interprets the Bible politically and draws a Biblical absolute for action.

Cobb, as a process theologian, tries to relate process theology to political theology. He argues with Soelle and says, "How are we today to address oppressive social systems is not to be decided by an appeal to a biblical absolute but by our shared reflection on what we are called to do as Christians."¹⁴ Ironically, Cobb keeps Kerygma, but overcomes faith bound up with the content of the Bible. He recognizes Biblical traditions as being a great authority for us, but not an absolute authority. He continues to say, "Our concern is faithfulness to God's call today, and we can be guided in that faithfulness by many

¹²Dorothee Soelle, Political Theology (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974) 60.

¹³Ibid., 48.

¹⁴John B. Cobb, Jr., Process Theology as Political Theology (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1982) 48.

authorities. Finally, we must decide."¹⁵ Theology today must recognize that we live in a different social context from that of Jesus, and the nascent Christianity we need to contextualize our faith must be an appropriate response to God's actions in the contemporary social context.

Richard Niebuhr presents the human being as responsive. He considers human responsibility in individual, social and universal dimensions. Before he plunges into the discussion, he clears his proposition by saying that all life, including the Christian life, has the character of responsiveness.¹⁶ Therefore, his second proposition is that his approach is not Bible-centered, but Bible-informed.¹⁷ He asserts that man, who is aware of himself beyond given mores and civic rules, can reach real self-acknowledgement and then freely respond to events in every dimension of life. The source of human responsiveness is human experience in the environment. For Niebuhr, the Scripture is primary, but not absolute, for guiding a response to experience in the social environment. In a word, contextualization as well as the Scriptures is the primary priority for discerning our response.

In this recent theological trend along with a new understanding of a way of biblical interpretation described above, there is a new dimension to formulate a theology in one's social experience. Especially, ethnic theology and the third world theology are apparent examples.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Richard Niebuhr, The Responsible Self, 107.

¹⁷Ibid.

During the 1960's, American Blacks became aware of themselves out of their history in America. Black theologians have explored their social oppression which was expressed in their folklore and have sought religious expression of their theological task. Their theology began with their social context in viewing the constant emerging theme of Biblical concern for their unjust environment. They have acknowledged that their economical predicament as a result of the counter majority's racial prejudice should be understood as a significant factor in their social and global dimension. In so doing, their ethnic theology has been broadened to relate their ethnic experience to the third world theology, in which theologians view their countries' economical exploitation, by so called advanced countries, as evil in the realm of international trade. Meanwhile, in Latin America, liberation theologians have recognized that their social, economic and political chaos stems from the advanced countries' economic exploitation of their countries. The appearance of liberation theology is bound up with Latin America's social context. Their environment has been affected deeply by global economic-political pressure in the distorted concept of "development." Typically, they have been given a promise that their underdeveloped society will become abundant in human welfare because of increased affluence. Since the human nature and destiny of Latin Americans have been determined, defined, and interpreted only by advanced countries and their theological conceptions, they desperately need their own understanding of the world situation from their economic-political perspective, and their own theology to reconstruct their Weltanschauung in response to their contemporary

social phenomena. Their term "Orthopraxis"¹⁸ describes their theology succinctly. They claim that their theology is correct in interpreting the Bible politically and is not traditional but orthodox. In the Old Testament God is the voice of the poor and oppressed through the proclamation of prophets. God's encounter with the oppressed is one part of the content of the Old Testament which continuously persists in the Jewish historical process. Gustavo Gutierrez claimed that "to love God is to do justice to the poor and oppressed."¹⁹ In the New Testament, to love our neighbors is the great command of God. In the early Christian community, the followers of Jesus Christ shared their property with one another and actively cared for each other. In doing so, the church proclaimed God's redemptive work, not word, over social injustice and took a position on which the church participates in the revolutionary process and attempts to abolish social injustice and build a more humanistic order. In contrast, the spiritual redemption formulated by Western dualistic thought (matter-mind) is foreign to the biblical mentality. It is challenged by the liberation theology, which has a biblical basis in which humanity's responsibility to respond to our contemporary global situation is desperately needed in social praxis.

Most of Asian-American theologians have been sharing their theological perspective with those of Black theologians and the third world liberation theologians because the social experience of Asian-

¹⁸Gustavo Gutierrez, A Theology of Liberation (New York: Orbis Books, 1973) 10.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 194.

Americans is similar to theirs. But, considering the particularity of Asian-Americans' cultural experience, they need to seek a more refined identity and find their historical task in formulating theology, not only because of the emphasis on prophetic proclamation for a just society, but also because of their historical responsiveness to global problems. The identity emerging from one's social and cultural context provides a way to find one's socio-historical task. If we deal with indigenization, rather than contextualization, in forming theology,²⁰ it becomes that an Asian-American theology goes beyond a theology in the political dimension, which is shared in Black Americans' and Latin Americans' thought. Indigenization in theology is an attempt to rake root in a unique culture. Contextualizing is one aspect of indigenization in forming theology. To be indigenized means to reinterpret ideas foreign to one's experience--to be immersed in one's long socio-cultural matrix. Things foreign to one's experience would be transformed in the soil of one's socio-cultural matrix. I am going to explore the Asian-Americans' cultural heritage to respond to the present global ecological deterioration.

Asian-Americans coming from Asia have a rich cultural experience, which is handed down through the family as though their cultural expres-

²⁰Here I differentiate between indigenization and contextualization. The term, "contextualization," has been used in western theology in applying the biblical message to its social context. Although it deals with one's cultural matrix, it seems to be confined to the contemporary socio-cultural matrix, such as today's technocratic environment and human consciousness. Meanwhile, the term "indigenization," which the third world countries' theologians prefer to use in applying the Christian message to their socio-cultural traditions, is understood as a way to explore one's socio-cultural tradition to understand the Christian message in one's proper sense. This attempt can bring our new understanding or contribution of our socio-cultural tradition to Western Christianity.

sion seems a particular factor of their identity. Oriental culture is deeply related with its people's perspective of nature. Asians have cherished nature. From the beginnings of their civilization, they learned to live in harmony with nature. Taoism is exemplary in this field. Wong elaborates on the Orientals somewhat religious attitude toward nature:

A Chinese artist is devoted to nature because to him the beauty and splendor of the world, the trees and valleys, the distant view of a mountain, are all visible manifestations of the working of the universal mind. There is a distinct feeling of oneness with nature, and this is transferred especially to landscape paintings.

In Chinese thought, there is, however, not only beauty in the world around us, but the order of the universe is essentially moral. It is man's duty to be conformed with that order. If man's life is attuned to Heaven, he can find that Heaven is trustworthy. Christians, too, believe that we must be reconciled to God, that we are working in harmony with Reality, which at its deepest level, is Jen or love.²¹

They make no attempt to conquer nature as a means of human welfare.

Making harmony with nature is basic to Oriental civilization. So a theology of Asian-Americans could go beyond the political dimension.

A theology within the political dimension has broadened their perspective to a socio-political consciousness. This is still anthropocentric and partial--touching only part of the problem. A theology in the political dimension resists exploitation of nature within the concept of "development in quantity," but it supports nature as an objective for the sake of human welfare. This attitude is linear and temporal in emphasizing human progress in history rather than spatial regard for

²¹Wong, 105.

nature. As nature is the mother of human existence, we need to curb global ecological deterioration not only from the socio-political perspective but from the ecological perspective in order to pursue a just and sustainable global condition. To be in harmony with nature is not simply adjusting our use of nature to sustain human society. Rather, it is to form a wholistic understanding of the universe that is organic and interconnected. The anthropocentric view of nature grew out of the Western dualistic view of human being versus nature or male versus female (nature; viewed as motherhood).²² It has led to an exploitative attitude toward nature. A theology of Asian-Americans would include an ecological perspective.

Finally, there is a question concerning Asian-American theology: does it understand the connection between the political and ecological dimensions, since a just society goes with sustainability and sustainable society goes with justice? A theology in the political dimension does not suggest that ecological sustainability is not affected by unjust economical development. In fact, political theologians criticize the contemporary human beings' overuse of natural resources. In their thought, the ecological system has deteriorated due to industrialization and materialism. However, although they view the ecological system as deeply related with economic activity, their perspective seems dualistic, since they emphasize subjective human use of nature as an object. This view must be reversed. Since all natural activities, including econo-

²²Rosemary Ruether, New Woman New Earth (New York: Seabury Press, 1975) 186.

political activity, are interconnected, it must be understood that this present global condition, including human society, is ecologically corrupt. This means that human problems in the political dimension are a part of ecological corruption as a whole. The narrow ecological understanding must be broadened to an understanding of human society in the ecological environment. This will enhance organic adjustment, not only in human society, but also toward nature as a whole. Since there is no "Utopia (no place)," what we can do is to improve our living quality within limited natural resources by not only constantly reforming our social structure but also being in harmony with nature in being aware of the symbiosis between human activity and nature in an ecological sense.

Chapter 6

CONCLUSION

The term "Asian-Americans" is not only an indication of Asian people living in America, but also a vortex of new experiences in the contemporary world. This project relies on their unique experiences due to being immigrants in the well-organized capitalistic America and their oriental cultural heritage to form their faith in the contemporary global context. Their vision is, characteristically, neither placing oriental culture above western culture nor simply following the western way of living, but building a third culture in which all ethnic groups are treated equally, and a better conditioned life is sought.

I explored this transformative power in the life of Asian-Americans to see how it could work in several dimensions of the contemporary problem-laden world.

First, I have tried to indicate that modern people are losing their spiritual power because they have given so much attention to sustaining the status quo--the norm of the middle class. I have emphasized that the underprivileged people (Asian-Americans are among them) have strong spiritual power and can demand their rights. Asian-Americans have been ill-treated in the American social, economic and political arenas. They have been suffering as a minority, along with other minorities. Nevertheless, their enthusiasm for living has come through their suffering, so they are now seeking a better living environment. Their enthusiasm would be one of their spiritual strengths, one that is needed

in the present concern for a just, caring, and humane society.

Second, I pointed to the family structure, sustained by group solidarity, and the nature-loving heritage of Asian-Americans in the materialism of the present. Due to the recent economic activity, dominated by mass production, modern people have been undergoing the lack of intimate relationships and additionally, facing ecological crisis. In this situation, I believe the family, as a basic social unit, must assume a significant role in reinstating basic human relationships and a nature-loving cultural heritage. The Asian-American family life and wholistic cultural ideals can become precious resources in the protection of human relationships and the preservation of nature.

Third, I examined the Asian-American religious attitude toward the living faiths that surround them. In history, the hatred generated when religions turned against each other has been a part of a tragic aspect of human history. Since the world has become pluralistic, theologians have been trying to isolate the essence of Christianity and build acceptable and fruitful relationships with other living faiths and cultures. In this mature trend, I have observed that the religious heritage of the Asian-Americans could contribute to dialogues between living faiths beyond religious exclusiveness.

Fourth, I started from the development of Biblical study to see how the understanding of the Scriptures is progressive according to the perspective of the contemporary social understanding. I adopted the Bible-informed method and the human subjective decision to search for today's just and sustainable society. I think the recent theologies,

such as Black theology, Liberation theology, and so forth, have emphasized the political dimension in formulating a vision of theology. Certainly Asian-Americans, who have been going through the agony of the contemporary world, could share the political dimension of faith with these theologies. But, this study has caused me to go one step further and envision the formation of faith ecologically within the nature-loving cultural heritage of the Asian-Americans. Since Asian-Americans have come from Asia, in which the wholistic view of the universe has been cherished, I am now able to see that their faith could go beyond the political dimension to an ecological dimension.

As we reviewed the unique experience and cultural heritage that can respond to the contemporary world, socially and theologically, Asian-American life can be interpreted to be a unique experience for formulating their faith and seeking a more appropriate society for modern people. Their life in America is still in the experimental stage, along with the present global community, because they are an emerging people. At least, like the good Samaritan in Luke 10:20-36, Asian-Americans, who understand in so many personal ways the present social suffering, could help heal the wounded, and take care of those who are caught up in the social problems of our contemporary social disorders. One step further, they are not only a community of people who have the potential to heal the wounded. They are also a group of people who have a rich cultural heritage and can contribute to the welfare of coming generations.

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